NATION

2nd abandoned Shiv temple found in Aligarh

≫ Page: 4 ≪

BUSINESS

GST Council to review rate rejig for 148 items today

≫ Page: 7 ≪

SPORTS

Sabar's gold breaks Asian Youth weightlifting record

≫ Page: 8 ≪

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Parl session ends amid BJP-INDIA bloc showdown

Lok Sabha registers 58% productivity & RS just 40%

NEW DELHI, 20 DEC

Parliament was adjourned sine die on Friday, concluding a tumultuous winter session marked by intense debates on constitutional issues and the introduction of two significant bills on simultaneous elections. However, the session also saw a steep decline in political decorum, particularly following allegations of disrespect towards Dr BR Ambedkar.

As the final day of the winter session unfolded, lingering tensions between the ruling National Democratic Alliance (NDA) and opposition parties persisted. Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla was compelled to adjourn the House within three minutes, foregoing the customary wrap-up of the session's highlights.

In the Rajya Sabha, proceedings were slightly more orderly, with opposition parties permitting Chairman Jagdeep Dhankhar to deliver his closing remarks before adjourning. Despite the cooperation, the session saw a significant drop in productivity, with the Lok Sabha achieving only 58 per cent productivity compared to historical highs.

In his final statements, Chairman Dhankhar urged parties to transcend political divides to uphold the sanctity of parliamentary dialogue, amid allegations of his parti-

BJP MPs protest against Congress leader Rahul Gandhi at Parliament complex in New Delhi on Friday **PHOTO: PTI**

sanship. The session, which commenced on November 25, was marked by merely 43 hours and 27 minutes of effective debate, reflecting a productivity rate of only 40.03 per cent.

Parliamentary Affairs Minister Kiren Rijiju attributed the session's lackluster performance primarily to the opposition's continual protests, particularly by Congress, which disrupted proceedings despite prior agreements to facilitate debate.

Over the course of the session, five bills were introduced in the Lok Sabha, with four passed, and three bills were adopted by the Rajya Sabha. The key legislative focus included two major bills aimed at implementing simultaneous elections for the Lok Sabha and state assemblies. *—PTI*

>>>More on Page 3

Sabha ran for 43 hours. Of this, the bills were discussed for 10 hours. Constitution debate lasted 17 and a half hours. Of the remaining 15 and a half hours or 30 per cent of the time it was Rajya Sabha Chairman talking

-Derek O'Brien, TMC MP

ONOE JPC PANEL TO NOW HAVE 39 MEMBERS

NEW DELHI, 20 DEC

The Indian government has announced an increase in the strength of the parliamentary joint committee tasked with scrutinising two bills on simultaneous elections, raising its membership from 31 to 39. This expansion aims to enhance representation from various political parties.

The proposed list now includes representatives from the Shiv Sena (UBT), CPI(M), and the Lok Janshakti Party (Ram Vilas), alongside two additional members from the BJP and one more from the Samajwadi Party. The committee will consist of 27 Lok Sabha members and 12 from the Rajya Sabha.

Union minister Arjun Ram Meghwal is expected to introduce a motion to refer the bills to this committee on Friday. Notable Lok Sabha MPs suggested for inclusion are Baijayant Panda and Sanjay Jaiswal from the BJP, Chhotelal from the Samajwadi Party, Anil Desai from the Shiv Sena (UBT), Shambhavi from the LJP, and K Radhakrishnan from the CPI(M). *—PTI*

YUNUS' AIDE STIRS TROUBLE

Be mindful: Delhi raps B'desh over 'annex' India post

NEW DELHI, 20 DEC

The Indian government has raised a strong protest with Dhaka following a controversial social media post by Mahfuz Alam, a prominent aide in Bangladesh's interim government.

India asked Bangladesh to be mindful after Alam's now-deleted Facebook post claimed that certain areas of Indian territory should actually belong to Bangladesh

Accompanying this claim was a map depicting parts of West Bengal, Tripura, and Assam as Bangladeshi territory.

His remarks have sparked significant backlash, prompting India's Ministry of External Affairs to issue a stern reminder to those involved to exercise caution in public statements.

India's External Affairs Ministry spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal confirmed that the government had formally protested to Bangladesh over the issue while expressing hopes for constructive relations grounded in mutual respect. He highlighted that such comments underscore the necessity for responsible public discourse, especially during a time when India-Bangladesh relations are reportedly strained following the transition of power to the interim government led by Muhammad Yunus earlier this

Randhir Jaiswal **PHOTO: X**

year.

Compounding tensions, Minister of State for External Affairs Kirti Vardhan Singh revealed that there have been approximately 2,200 reported cases of violence against Hindus and other minorities in Bangladesh this year, heightening India's concerns over the safety of these communities. In contrast, he noted that Pakistan recorded 112 such incidents until October 2023. Singh urged both neighbouring nations to take decisive action to protect minority rights and ensure their security.

The situation comes amid India's efforts to maintain regional stability and cooperation through various platforms, with particular emphasis on enhancing ties with Bangladesh while addressing humanitarian concerns. *—PTI*

HC gives interim bail to CT Ravi

BENGALURU, 20 DEC

High Court on Friday granted interim bail to BJP MLC CT Ravi, who had been arrested for allegedly making derogatory remarks against State Minister for Women and Child Development Laxmi Hebbalkar. Ravi denied the allegations, claiming he did not make any such remarks during a session of the Legislative Council.

The High Court ordered immediate release of Ravi in its interim order, observing that police failed to follow the procedures in arresting him. However, the bench of Justice MG Uma asked Ravi to co-operate with the investigation and be available for questioning.

The bench said, "Even if the incident as alleged occurred which is most unfortunate, the police would not have apprehended him without following the procedure."

The case was transferred from the Belagavi City Fifth Additional Magistrate's Court to a Special Court for Elected Representatives in Bengaluru. Judge Sparsh D'Souza initially

CT Ravi spotted with a bandage in Belagavi court **PHOTO: PTI**

adjourned the hearing before transferring it, citing that it would be heard by a court designated for elected officials. Ravi was produced before Judicial Magistrate First Class (KMFC)-4 at 11 am. In court, Ravi claimed that on Thursday, while attending the Legislature session at Suvarna Vidhan Soudha, he was forcibly arrested by the police without being informed of the reasons for his detention. Ravi further alleged that he was beaten at two police stations—Hire Bagewadi and Khanapur—and that his mobile phone and smart wristwatch were seized by the police.

He also informed the court that during his detention, the police received phone calls every 10 minutes and followed orders to move him to various locations throughout the night. Ravi alleged that the government was attempting to kill him. Ravi, a five-time MLA, said he was put in a jeep and driven around for over 500 km throughout the night, before being brought to court on Friday morning. He claimed that the police had denied him dinner and only allowed a medical check-up at a primary

I've sustained injuries while in Khanapur. Without any humanity, without any consideration that I'm a legislator, the entire night I have been taken on rounds. Cops violated human rights -CT Ravi, BJP MLC

I'm in great shock, sadness. Soon after the incident, my daughter-in-law called me and told me you are a warrior, we are all with you
-Laxmi Hebbalkar, Minister

health center in Mutaga, Belagavi. He also alleged that Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar and Hebbalkar had threatened him in the Council hall that he would not return alive to his native Chikkamagaluru. Additionally, Ravi clarified that he used the word "frustrated" to describe Laxmi Hebbalkar, which was misconstrued as a derogatory term. *—Salar News*

>>>More on Page 2

CM hails Tipu at Kannada Sahitya Sammelana

MANDYA, 20 DEC

Chief Minister Siddaramaiah on Friday praised the contributions of Mysuru ruler Tipu Sultan to Mandya's development. Speaking at the Akhila Bharata Kannada Sahitya Sammelana in Mandya, he described the district as the heart of Kannada culture, where non-Kannadigas are compelled to learn the local language, unlike other parts of the state.

Siddaramaiah also voiced concerns about the country's Constitution, claiming it is under threat and needs safeguarding. He criticized the central government for alleged unfair tax allocation to Karnataka, stating the state contributes Rs 4.5 lakh crore in taxes but receives only Rs 59,000 crore in return. He also raised concerns over reduced NABARD grants for agriculture.

Further condemning the imposition of Hindi in linguistic states, Siddaramaiah reaf

PHOTO: SALAR

firmed his government's commitment to promoting Kannada. He expressed satisfaction over the organization of the Kannada Sammelana in Mandya after a 30-year hiatus, highlighting the district's prominence in Kannada-speaking regions and its sugar industry. The 87th Akhila Bharatha Kannada Sahithya Sammelana commenced with a vibrant procession from the district commissioner's office to the venue at Srinivasapura. Over 210 cultural troupes, including six from other states, participated, with more than 2,500 artists. *—Salar News*

>>>More on Page 2

Former Haryana CM Om Prakash Chautala dies at 89

CHANDIGARH, 20 DEC

Indian National Lok Dal president and former Haryana chief minister Om Prakash Chautala died in Gurugram on Friday, a party spokesperson said. He was 89. Chautala, a five-time chief minister of Haryana and former deputy prime minister Devi Lal's son, suffered a cardiac arrest. *—PTI*

>>>More on Page 3

Govt hikes copra MSP by Rs 420/qtl for 2025

NEW DELHI, 20 DEC

The government on Friday announced an increase in the minimum support price (MSP) for copra by up to Rs 420 to Rs 12,100 per quintal for 2025 with a budget outlay of Rs 855 crore. The MSP for 'milling copra' has been increased by Rs 420 to Rs 11,582 per quintal, while for 'ball copra' by Rs 100 to Rs 12,100 per quintal for 2025, Information and Broadcasting Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw told reporters. *—PTI*

Dallewal writes to SC, asks govt to accept demands

CHANDIGARH, 20 DEC

Punjab farmer leader Jagjit Singh Dallewal, whose fast-unto-death entered 25th day on Friday, wrote to the Supreme Court, urging it to direct the Centre to accept the farmers' demands including a legal guarantee of the minimum support price on crops. Dallewal, 70, a cancer patient, has been on a fast-unto-death at the Khanauri border. *—PTI*

>>>More on Page 4

'MAKE IN INDIA'

Defence ministry signs Rs 7,628 cr contract with L&T for Vajra Guns

NEW DELHI, 20 DEC

The Indian Ministry of Defence has finalised a significant contract with Larsen & Toubro Ltd for the procurement of K9 Vajra artillery guns worth Rs 7,628 crore. This purchase is expected to substantially enhance the Indian Army's strike capabilities.

The K9 Vajra, a 155 mm/52 calibre self-propelled tracked artillery gun, is equipped with advanced technology to deliver long-range, precise firepower. Approximately 100 units are being procured for deployment along the Line of Actual Control (LAC), primarily aimed at bolstering military readiness in strategically sensitive areas.

An official statement from the ministry highlighted that the

acquisition of the K9 Vajra-T guns is a key element in the ongoing modernisation efforts of the artillery corps, significantly improving operational readiness. The versatility of the artillery gun, coupled with its cross-country mobility, will enhance the Indian Army's firepower, allowing for more profound strikes with increased accuracy in various terrains.

The K9 Vajra's capability to perform effectively in sub-zero temperatures at high altitudes further underscores its operational utility. The ministry also noted that the project will create over nine lakh man-days of employment over four years, fostering participation from various Indian industries, including micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs).

This procurement marks a significant achievement for India's 'Aatmanirbhar Bharat' initiative, reinforcing the government's 'Make in India' commitment to boost indigenous defence production. The K9 Vajra artillery guns are poised to become a cornerstone of India's military strategy, contributing to national security and regional stability. *—PTI*

Massive fire breaks following a truck collision outside a petrol pump, in Jaipur, on Friday **PHOTO: X**

11 killed in Jaipur accident

JAIPUR, 20 DEC

A catastrophic collision between an LPG tanker and a truck on the Jaipur-Ajmer highway ignited a massive fireball, resulting in 11 fatalities and engulfing 37 vehicles early on Friday morning.

The incident, which occurred around 5:30 am near a school, was triggered by a damaged outlet nozzle on the LPG tanker, causing a rapid gas leak. The state's health minister, Gajendra Singh Khimsar, stated that approximately half of the injured are in critical condition. Rajasthan government announced compensation of Rs 5 lakh for the kin of those deceased and Rs 1 lakh for the injured. *—PTI*

>>>More on Page 4

Appointing Senthil as Minister after bail wrong: SC

NEW DELHI, 20 DEC

The Supreme Court has described the appointment of DMK leader V Senthil Balaji as a Tamil Nadu minister shortly after his bail in a money laundering case as "terribly wrong". A bench consisting of Justices Abhay S Oka and Augustine George Masih expressed concern over the decision, citing that many witnesses in the case are public officials.

"It can't be axiomatic that the moment a person is released he becomes a minister," the bench asserted, calling for the state government to respond regarding ongoing cases against Balaji.

The Enforcement Directorate (ED), which arrested Balaji in June 2023 for his alleged role in a cash-for-jobs scam, claimed that witness examinations have been obstructed since his release. *—PTI*

Ravi abusing Hebbalkar is an offence, says CM

DKS rules out govt role in police action

MANDYA, 20 DEC

Chief Minister Siddaramaiah on Friday termed BJP MLC CT Ravi allegedly using a derogatory word against Minister Laxmi Hebbalkar as an "offence".

He also hit out at the BJP and questioned whether the party supports derogatory comments made against a woman.

Ravi allegedly used a derogatory word against Hebbalkar in the Legislative Council on Thursday, during an altercation between them, when the House was adjourned for a while.

Speaking to reporters here, he said, "Normally women don't give false complaints about comments made against them."

Noting that Ravi had said that he had not used any derogatory word and the word used by him was "frustrate", Siddaramaiah said, "This seems to be an afterthought. Hebbalkar has clearly said that derogatory word was used against her and others too have heard it. I'm told there is audio and video."

About Ravi claiming threat to his life and the government is responsible for it, the CM said, "All offenders say such things."

Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar ruled out any government interference in the police action and arrest of Ravi. Calling Ravi "foul mouth", he claimed the former BJP national general secretary has even made derogatory comments against Congress leader Rahul Gandhi.

"Will they go and do a BJP meeting at Khanapur police station? (referring to BJP leaders meeting Ravi at station) ... police have shown too much courtesy towards him. How did the police allow it (meeting)?" Shivakumar said.

"Family members or one or two people can go and meet, but they were having a meeting inside (the police station)... then what is this allegation of attempting to kill him (Ravi)?"

Terming Hebbalkar's supporters' anger against Ravi as "natural", Shivakumar said, "Their leader, their daughter was insulted." Slamming Ravi, he said, "This is not new for him. He had used words against people in the past... he had even called CM Siddaramaiah as Siddaramulla Khan....this is his culture." —*PTI*

Congress workers protest against BJP MLC CT Ravi's remark against minister Laxmi Hebbalkar, in Bengaluru on Friday ***PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD***

Police acting under Cong's pressure: BJP

Cong goons attacked Ravi: Vijayendra

BELAGAVI, 20 DEC

BY Vijayendra, the Karnataka BJP President, accused the State police of acting under pressure from the Congress party, following the arrest of BJP MLC CT Ravi. Vijayendra condemned the State government for allegedly permitting "Congress goons" to attempt an attack on Ravi at the Suvarna Vidhana Soudha in Belagavi.

On Thursday, a group of individuals identified as supporters of Minister Laxmi Hebbalkar confronted Ravi angrily within the Assembly premises, although security personnel intervened. Protests erupted outside the building, resulting in several detentions by the police.

"The police are being compelled by Congress. Siddaramaiah, power is not eternal," Vijayendra remarked, criticising the Chief Minister for his ruling approach. He expressed outrage over Ravi's arrest, asserting that doing so without apprising the Council Chairman was unacceptable.

At a protest near Chennamma Circle in Belagavi, Vijayendra said Ravi was driven roughly 500km without medical attention after suffering injuries, lacking food and water. —*PTI*

BJP workers protest against State government for arresting MLC CT Ravi, at Freedom Park in Bengaluru on Friday ***PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD***

PROTESTING BJP LEADERS DETAINED IN MYSURU, RELEASED LATER

MYSURU, 20 DEC

Around two dozen BJP activists were detained and later released in Mysuru on Friday as they attempted to lay siege to District Congress office, demanding the release of BJP MLC CT Ravi. Over 100 BJP supporters, including local leaders, were taken into preventive custody for obstructing traffic at Hanumathappa Circle during a protest against Ravi's arrest.

Protests also erupted in Belagavi, Kalaburagi, and other parts of the State. District Congress activists staged a counter-protest, condemning Ravi's obscene remarks. BJP had called for a bandh in his native Chikkamagaluru.

—*Salar News*

School employee 'molests' minor girls in Mysuru

MYSURU, 20 DEC

Gundlupet Police have filed an FIR against an employee of the Melukamanahalli Morarji Desai Residential School in Gundlupet taluk of Chamarajanagar district for allegedly molesting minor girls. Police have registered a case against Nagaraju, based on a complaint filed by Child Development Programme Officer Hemavathy. Police have launched a manhunt to arrest him. Nagaraju has been charged with BNS Section 74 and provisions of POCSO Act. Demanding Nagaraju's arrest, parents and relatives of the victims held a protest outside the school on Thursday. A team of district officials led by Additional Deputy Commissioner Geetha Hudeda and District Tribal Welfare Officer HS Bindiya have recommended mass transfer of both teaching and non-teaching staff of the school. —*Salar News*

PHOTO: X

Youth booked for impregnating minor girl

MYSURU, 20 DEC

Kollegal Rural Police have registered a case under Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act against a youth for allegedly impregnating a minor girl, promising marriage. According to the FIR, Mallikarjuna of the Kollegal taluk developed a friendship with a student of Class 10 and sexually abused her multiple times, promising that he would marry her. The pregnancy came to light when parents took the girl to a hospital for treatment of some health issues. Based on a complaint filed by the girl's parents, the police registered a case against Mallikarjuna. He is absconding after learning about the case. — *Salar News*

3 held for selling property with forged documents

BENGALURU, 20 DEC

The Central Crime Branch (CCB) police have apprehended three individuals in connection with a fraudulent scheme involving the sale of a property in Kothanur Village. A complaint was lodged by a resident of Cox Town, claiming that a gang had illicitly copied property documents belonging to his father-in-law and created counterfeit stamp papers to deceive potential buyers.

In response to the complaint, the police launched an investigation, leading to the arrest of two suspects at a residence in Lingarajapuram. Authorities seized a range of forged documents, including sale deeds and General Power of Attorney papers. The duo has since been released on conditional bail. Meanwhile, another suspect has obtained a stay order from the court and is cooperating with investigators.

One accused remains at large, with police trying to locate him. —*Salar News*

City man arrested for Rs 1.9 crore property scam

BENGALURU, 20 DEC

Hebbal police have arrested a 40-year-old man, Girish, accused of defrauding house-hunters via a fraudulent advertisement on the 'No-broker' mobile app. According to police reports, Girish allegedly cheated at least 22 individuals out of approximately Rs 1.9 crore by falsely advertising a second-floor house registered in his wife's name. The victims, lured by what appeared to be an enticing deal, contacted Girish and were subsequently asked to make advance payments ranging from Rs 2 lakh to Rs 6 lakh for a lease. Victims filed complaints after discovering the scheme, prompting police to initiate an investigation. —*Salar News*

Folk expert calls for protection of Kannada

MANDYA, 20 DEC

Folk expert Go Ru Channabasappa has urged the State government to take decisive action to protect the Kannada language, particularly targeting the younger generation through effective use of technology. He presented a comprehensive 48-page charter of demands during his presidential address at the 87th Akhila Bharata Kannada Sahitya Sammelana in Mandya.

Channabasappa condemned the Union government for its inadequate financial support to Karnataka, asserting the need for equal treatment regarding fund allocation. A key demand was for compulsory Kannada medium education up to Class X and a halt to the establishment of new English medium schools in the state.

He highlighted concerns surrounding the imposition of Hindi and the ongoing challenges facing the Kannada language. Channabasappa called for the promotion of a book-reading culture and addressed issues affecting Kannadigas living in border areas. Furthermore, he advocated for the equal treatment of women, including a proposal to reserve 15% of the budget for education to strengthen Kannada schools.

The folk expert urged the government to reserve Group C and D jobs for Kannadigas in all government departments. —*Salar News*

Chief Minister Siddaramaiah inaugurates 87th Akhila Bharata Kannada Sahitya Sammelana in Mandya on Friday ***PHOTO: SALAR***

Gang of 3 held for duping unemployed

BENGALURU, 20 DEC

Central Crime Branch (CCB) has apprehended three individuals accused of defrauding job seekers with false promises of employment in the railways. The arrests were made during a special operation conducted by the CCB's Organised Crime (West) division, aimed at targeting con artists exploiting the ambitions of unemployed youth.

Bengaluru Police Commissioner B Dayananda reported that the gang specifically targeted young job aspirants, offering fake guarantees of positions such as railway ticket collectors, capitalising on their hopes for stable government jobs.

The investigation revealed that the group had amassed over Rs 80 lakh from unsuspecting victims through these fraudulent schemes. While three members have been detained, police are currently searching for an additional suspect. —*Salar News*

IIM head booked for caste discrimination

BENGALURU, 20 DEC

Bengaluru police have filed a First Information Report (FIR) against Rishikesh T Krishnan, Director of IIM Bangalore, along with Dean Dinesh Kumar and six other faculty members, following allegations of caste-based discrimination. The case, registered at Mico Layout Police Station, comes after an inquiry by the Directorate of Civil Rights Enforcement (DCRE) substantiated claims made by Associate Professor Gopal Das, a Dalit academic at the institution.

The FIR cites faculty members Dinesh Kumar, G Sainesh, Srinivas Praka, Chetan Subramanian, Ashish Mishra, Srilatha Jonalagedu, and Rahul De, who face charges under Sections 3(1)(r) and 3(1)(s) of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, relating to caste-based insults and abuse.

The controversy erupted in January 2024 when Das wrote to President Droupadi Murmu, alleging incidents of humiliation and exclusion related to his caste. The DCRE's investigation, initiated in March at the President's behest, found substantial evidence of discrimination, including claims that Krishnan had disclosed Das's caste in an internal email and denied him professional opportunities.

The inquiry highlighted IIM Bangalore's failure to implement grievance mechanisms for SC/ST employees, creating a hostile work environment. The government instructed Bengaluru Commissioner to act under SC/ST (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, leading to the filing of the FIR on 20 December. —*Salar News*

PFI member held in Nettaru murder case

NEW DELHI, 20 DEC

The National Investigation Agency (NIA) has apprehended a prominent absconding member of the banned Popular Front of India (PFI) in connection with the murder of BJP leader Praveen Nettaru. Kodaje Mohammed Sherif, a former state executive committee member of the PFI, was detained upon his arrival from Bahrain at New Delhi's Indira Gandhi International Airport. A lookout circular had been issued for him.

Praveen Nettaru, a member of the BJP Yuva Morcha, was allegedly killed by PFI operatives on 26 July 2022 in Bellare village, Sullia Taluk, Dakshina Kannada District, Karnataka. The NIA took over the investigation on 4 August 2022, subsequently arresting 20 individuals and filing charges against 23 accused, including three absconders, as part of case RC-36/2022/NIA/DLI.

NIA findings suggest that Sherif was a key figure within the PFI, acting as the head of the group's Service Team and instrumental in organising arms training for its members in Mittur. Investigators claim Sherif played a critical role in orchestrating the murder. —*Salar News*

BTP upgrades website with real-time traffic updates

BENGALURU, 20 DEC

The Bengaluru Traffic Police (BTP) on Friday unveiled a revamped version of their official website btp.gov.in featuring advanced functionalities such as real-time traffic updates and seamless payment of traffic fines.

The upgraded portal was launched by the City Police Commissioner B Dayanand.

"The updated website introduces a live traffic congestion map powered by Google Maps to provide users with real-time updates on traffic conditions," said Dayanand.

Areas of high congestion are highlighted in red and alternate routes with shorter travel times are suggested to help commuters avoid delays.

Enhanced data analytics now underpin the platform, offering comprehensive insights into the city's traffic situation, including live updates on road closures, diversions, and congestion.

"Users can report traffic violations, register complaints or suggestions and pay or dispute traffic fines through dedicated sections," said Dayanand.

The daily traffic updates and alerts shared on social media by individual traffic police stations and the DCP offices will also be consolidated on the website.

The website launch comes on the heels of the Bengaluru Traffic Police receiving three prestigious awards for their innovative use of technology in traffic monitoring and regulation.

—*Salar News*

Jayadeva institute to open its unit in Kalaburagi

KALABURAGI, 20 DEC

The Jayadeva Institute of Cardiovascular Sciences and Research will inaugurate a Rs 262.20 crore facility in Kalaburagi on 22 December, officials said. The branch will cater to the population of the Kalyana Karnataka region and nearby districts.

The 371-bed hospital features three Cath Labs, advanced operation theatres and dedicated units for cardiology, paediatric cardiology and radiology. It is also equipped CT scan, 1.5T MRI and ultrasonography. —*Salar News*

ACTIVISTS SPEAK UP

'Skydeck, tunnel road misplaced priorities'

BENGALURU, 20 DEC

As the State government and Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike (BBMP) proceed with plans to construct a 250-metre skydeck and a six-lane, 18km tunnel road at a combined cost of Rs 17,000 crore, civic activists and urban planning experts have expressed strong opposition to what they call misplaced priorities.

During an event organised by the Citizens Voluntary Initiative for the City (CIVIC-Bengaluru) at Gandhi Bhavan on Friday, speakers emphasised the urgent need for ensuring essential infrastructure before taking up such costly and grandiose projects.

"Our public transport system is already operating beyond capacity. Namma Metro lacks last-mile connectivity and the BMTC does not have sufficient buses," Professor Ashish Verma from IISc's Sustainable Transportation Lab said.

"Traffic congestion is a major issue. These projects (the skydeck and tunnel road) may temporarily alleviate it but pose significant geological and environmental risks," he added.

CIVIC Executive Trustee Kathyayini Chamaraj called the skydeck as a "vanity project". She said, "The tunnel roads and similar proposals, including expressways and double-decker flyovers, cost over Rs 50,000 crore collectively. Why not channel these funds towards improving basic amenities like footpaths and waste management?"

Former chief secretary of Karnataka Dr A Ravindra said, "The Bengaluru Metropolitan Land Transport Authority (BMLTA), tasked with overseeing transport projects, remains largely dysfunctional. This undermines constitutional provisions for decentralised planning." —*Salar News*

Speakers at an event organised by Citizens Voluntary Initiative for the City (CIVIC-Bengaluru) in Bengaluru on Friday ***PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD***

Red tape delays survey of 'encroached' forest land

KOLAR, 20 DEC

The much publicised joint survey of forest land allegedly encroached by former speaker KR Ramesh Kumar at Jingalakunte forest area in Hosahudya village of Srinivasapur taluk turned out to be failed exercise on Friday.

While the Kolar deputy conservator of forest and his team turned up for the survey, representatives of the revenue and land record authorities failed to turn up at the site.

While Ramesh Kumar claims that he purchased the land in question from farmers, the forest department insists that he has encroached about 63 acres of forest land.

Based on the directions of Union government, deputy conservator of forest, Kolar, issued notices to Ramesh Kumar as well as revenue and land records authorities in Kolar for a joint survey of the land on 6 November. However, the land records department halted the exercise, citing "technical issues".

Meanwhile, the forest department again issued notices to the revenue and land records department authorities and Ramesh Kumar for a survey on 20 December.

However, Bengaluru regional commissioner issued a direction to Kolar deputy commissioner on Thursday, stating that the deputy conservator of forests has no jurisdictional power to issue notices to the deputy commissioner and other revenue department officials and they need not follow the instructions. The regional commissioner fixed 2 January as the next date for the joint survey. —*Salar News*

PHOTO: WIKIPEDIA

Allahabad HC stays arrest of fact checker Zubair

PRAYAGRAJ, 20 DEC

The Allahabad High Court on Friday stayed the arrest of Alt News co-founder Mohammed Zubair in relation to an FIR accusing him of promoting enmity among religious groups following a complaint by an associate of controversial priest Yati Narsinghanand. The order was passed by a bench of justices Siddhartha Varma and Nalin Kumar Srivastava. In her complaint, general secretary of Yati Narsinghanand Saraswati Trust Udita Tyagi claimed Zubair posted a video clip of an old programme of Narsinghanand on 3 October with the intent to provoke violence by Muslims against him. It was further alleged that Zubair posted edited clips of the priest on X, containing Narsinghanand's alleged incendiary remarks on Prophet Muhammad. *—PTI*

PM's Kuwait visit to enhance bilateral ties: MEA

NEW DELHI, 20 DEC

Prime Minister Narendra Modi is set to embark on a two-day visit to Kuwait on Saturday, a trip anticipated to deepen bilateral ties, according to the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA). The visit, at the invitation of Kuwaiti Emir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, aims to foster a dynamic partnership in various fields, including defence and trade. During his stay, Modi will engage with Kuwait's leadership and connect with the sizable Indian community, the largest expatriate group in the Gulf state. Notably, the last Indian Prime Minister to visit Kuwait was Indira Gandhi in 1981.India ranks among Kuwait's top trading partners, with bilateral trade reaching USD 10.47 billion in the 2023-24 financial year.*—PTI*

After power theft stairs at Sambhal MP's house razed

INDORE, 20 DEC

An alleged encroachment outside Samajwadi Party MP Ziaur Rahman Barq's house in Sambhal, Uttar Pradesh, was razed with a bulldozer on Friday afternoon with authorities saying the construction was illegal. Meanwhile, Electricity Department has imposed a fine of Rs 1.91 crore Rehman and also disconnected the electricity supply to his residence for alleged power theft at his residence, an official said on Friday. The development follows a police case registered him on Thursday. His father Mamlukur Rehman Barq was also booked for allegedly threatening officials during the inspection at their residence in Deepa Sarai area, they said. *—PTI*

TN BJP takes out rally, police detains Annamalai

COIMBATORE, 20 DEC

BJP on Friday held a "Black day procession" here condemning the "glorification of a terrorist," and police detained party state unit president K Annamalai and leaders of Hindu outfits. Carrying banners that accused the state government of supporting "Coimbatore bomb blast terrortists," BJP workers and cadres affiliated to RSS outfits, including the Hindu Munnani took part in the procession. The state government permitting the "funeral procession" of banned Al-Umma founder SA Basha days ago here with police protection came in for flak from Hindu outfits. *—PTI*

LS sends ONOE Bills to joint committee of two Houses

BJP MP PP Chaudhary to head the joint committee of Parl

Samajwadi Party MPs shout slogans during INDIA bloc's protest against Home Minister Amit Shah over his remarks related to BR Ambedkar, at Parliament, in New Delhi, on Friday *PHOTO: PTI*

NEW DELHI, 20 DEC

Amid uproar over Home Minister Amit Shah's remarks related to BR Ambedkar, the Lok Sabha on Friday referred the two bills on simultaneous polls to a joint committee of Parliament.

Instead of taking up the Question Hour, Speaker Om Birla asked Law Minister Arjun Ram Meghwal to move the resolution to refer the Constitution (129th Amendment) Bill, 2024, and the Union Territories Laws (Amendment) Bill, 2024, referred to Joint Committee of Parliament comprising 27 members from the Lok Sabha and 12 from the Rajya Sabha.

The resolution was adopted by a voice vote amid noisy scenes. The Lok Sabha was then adjourned sine die (indefinitely), bringing to an end the Winter session which began on 5 November. The two 'one nation, one election' (ONOE) bills, including one requiring an amendment in the Constitution, lay down the mechanism to hold simultaneous elections and were introduced in the Lok Sabha on Tuesday after a fiery debate.

BJP MP PP Chaudhary has been appointed as the Chairperson to head the joint committee of Parliament that will scrutinise the two bills proposing simultaneous elections, sources said on Thursday. Strength of the committee was increased from 31 MPs to 39, giving representation to more parties. While the panel already includes BJP's PP Chaudhury and Anurag Thakur, Priyanka Gandhi Vadra of the Congress is another prominent member on the committee. *—PTI*

Mamata calls for statewide protests on Ambedkar row

NEW DELHI, 20 DEC

TMC chairperson and West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Friday called for statewide protests on December 23 against the BJP, accusing the party of insulting Dr BR Ambedkar, the architect of the Constitution.

In a strongly worded statement shared on social media, Banerjee alleged that Union Home Minister Amit Shah had made "derogatory remarks" in Parliament about Ambedkar and other members of the Constitution drafting committee.

She described the comments as an affront to India's democracy and an attack on the values upheld by the Constitution.

Meanwhile, Senior Congress leader Jairam Ramesh on Friday said the Opposition parties could again submit a notice to move a motion of no-confidence against Rajya Sabha Chairman Jagdeep Dhankhar in the Budget Session, asserting the notice that was rejected was "only a trailer". *—PTI*

Rahul Parl scuffle: Case moved to Delhi police Crime Branch

NEW DELHI, 20 DEC

Delhi Police on Friday transferred the case against Congress leader Rahul Gandhi in connection with a scuffle on the Parliament premises to its Crime Branch, an officer said.

This comes a day after the city police registered an FIR against Gandhi accusing him of "physical assault and incitement" during a scuffle in Parliament premises.

Meanwhile, the health condition of two BJP MPs, who suffered head injuries in a face-off between opposition and NDA members in Parliament premises, is much better now and they remain under observation in the ICU of the Ram Manohar Lohia Hospital here, authorities said.

Delhi police was also likely to write to the Parliament secretariat, seeking access to CCTV footage of the area where the alleged incident occurred.

Congress however rejected the claim, alleging that BJP MPs pushed its chief Mallikarjun Kharge and "physically manhandled" Rahul. Accusing Gandhi of showing "criminally edited" speech of Home Minister Amit Shah, BJP MP Nishikant Dubey submitted a breach of privilege notice against Gandhi in the Lok Sabha to Speaker Om Birla. Dubey alleged that Gandhi has exhibited yet another case of "political bankruptcy" by sharing on social media, especially X, the "edited" version of Shah's Rajya Sabha speech with the sole intent of stoking public sentiments and lowering the dignity of Parliament and the country. *—PTI*

BJP MP Aparajita Sarangi holds a bag with a message of '1984 riots' to hand it to Congress leader Priyanka Gandhi *PHOTO: PTI*

> **Rahul ji can never push anyone, I am his sister I know him, he can never do such a thing**
>
> - Priyanka Gandhi Vadra, Wayanad MP

ED books KTR in Formula-E graft case

HYDERABAD, 20 DEC

The Enforcement Directorate on Friday filed a money laundering case against BRS leader KT Rama Rao and some others in a case linked to alleged payment irregularities during the Formula-E race held in Hyderabad in February 2023, official sources said.

An Enforcement Case Information Report (ECIR) has been registered under various sections of the Prevention of Money Laundering Act taking cognisance of a Telangana Police Anti-corruption bureau FIR filed on Thursday, the sources said.

The accused in the ED case are the same as those mentioned in the ACB FIR, they said. BRS leader KT Rama Rao, the son of former chief minister of the state K Chandrashekhar Rao, has been named as accused no 1 followed by senior IAS officer Arvind Kumar and retired bureaucrat BLN Reddy as accused no 2 and 3.

The case pertains to alleged payments of about Rs 55 crore, some of it in foreign currency without approvals, to conduct a Formula-E race in Hyderabad during the previous regime in February last year. KTR, had denied wrongdoing, saying "Where is corruption in this? We have paid Rs 55 crore. They acknowledged the payment."

"The HMDA (Hyderabad Metropolitan Development Authority) has an account in the Indian Overseas Bank and money has been transferred from that account..." KTR had said reacting to the ACB case. *—PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

NITISH TO LEAD CHARGE IN 2025 BIHAR ASSEMBLY POLLS, SAYS NDA

PATNA, 20 DEC

The ruling NDA in Bihar on Friday dismissed speculations that the coalition could do a rethink on projecting Chief Minister Nitish Kumar as its leader in the Assembly polls due next year.

Speaking to the media after a meeting held here to bring about better coordination at the grassroots level, state presidents of parties including the BJP, Kumar's JD (U) and Union minister Chirag Paswan's Lok Janshakti Party (Ram Vilas) also rubbished suggestions triggered by Union Home Minister Amit Shah's recent statement.

Dilip Jaiswal, state minister and Bihar BJP chief said, "We should understand that Amit Shah was trying to underscore that he was a 'karyakarta' (worker) of a party in which big decisions are taken by the parliamentary board".

"But, the leadership role of Chief Minister Nitish Kumar had been a given for long. There is no question of going back on that," asserted Jaiswal. *—PTI*

Attacks on Marathis on the rise after M'rashtra polls: Raut

MUMBAI, 20 DEC

Shiv Sena UBT leader Sanjay Raut on Friday claimed attacks on Marathi-speaking people have increased after the BJP won the Maharashtra assembly polls and alleged that an environment was being created to drive them out of Mumbai and neighbouring areas.

Talking to reporters, Raut highlighted an incident at Kalyan in Thane district, where non-Marathi-speaking people allegedly attacked a Marathi-speaking family.

He further dubbed the Maharashtra government as "inauspicious" over the death of 14 people in the collision between a navy craft and a passenger ferry. He alleged that dacoity and murders were taking place in villages and districts.

Meanwhile, Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis nnounced judicial probes into the Parbhani violence and the murder of village head Santosh Deshmukh in Beed district.

The state will also provide financial assistance of Rs 10 lakh each to the kin of Deshmukh and Somnath Suryawanshi, who died after his arrest in connection with the violence in Parbhani over the alleged desecration of a replica of the Constitution, he said.

Announcing the transfer of Beed Superintendent of Police, the CM said the police were found to be lax. *—PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

Delhi polls: AAP releases 5th list

NEW DELHI, 20 DEC

Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) on Friday released its fifth list of candidates list for Delhi Assembly elections 2025 and fielded Mahender Chaudhary from Mehrauli.

On 15 December, AAP released its fourth list of 38 candidates for the Delhi Elections 2025.

As per the list, the party's national convener and former Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal will contest from New Delhi, Atishi from Kalkaji, Minister Saurabh Bharadwaj from Greater Kailash and Minister Gopal Rai from Babarpur.

Additionally, Satyendra Kumar Jain will contest from Shakur Basti, Durgesh Pathak from Rajinder Nagar, Ramesh Pehalwan from Kasturba Naga, Raghuvinder Shokeen from Nangloi Jat, Som Dutt from Sadar Bazar, Imran Hussain from Ballimaran, Jarnail Singh from Tilak Nagar. Minister Saurabh Bharadwaj will contest from Greater Kailash and Minister Gopal Rai will contest from Babarpur.

Additionally, Satyendra Kumar Jain will contest from Shakur Basti, Durgesh Pathak from Rajinder Nagar, Ramesh Pehalwan from Kasturba Nagar. Naresh Balyan's wife Pooja Naresh Balyan has been fielded from Uttam Nagar.

BJP leader Ramesh Pehalwan and his wife Kusumlata Ramesh joined the AAP on 15 December. The couple joined the party in the presence of Kejriwal, the party's national convenor.

AAP won 62 out of the 70 seats in 2020 and BJP secured eight seats. *—PTI*

61ST RAISING DAY CELEBRATIONS

SSB plays key role in securing borders, combating Naxalism: Shah

SILIGURI, 20 DEC

Union Home Minister Amit Shah praised the Sashastra Seema Bal (SSB) on Friday for its crucial role in securing India's borders with neighbouring nations, particularly Nepal and Bhutan, during the force's 61st Raising Day celebrations in Siliguri. Shah highlighted the SSB's vigilance in safeguarding the Siliguri Corridor and the eastern region.

He acknowledged the SSB's significant contributions to combating left-wing extremism, stating, "The SSB has played an important role in ending the menace of Naxalism in Bihar and Jharkhand." He noted that the agency's proactive efforts, in conjunction with other security forces and local police, have considerably weakened Naxal activities in Chhattisgarh.

Shah also recognised the SSB's achievements in curbing anti-national activities along the border and commended their initiatives to promote cultural integration between India's border communities and the wider population. SSB has also been instrumental in removing encroachments, particularly along the India-Nepal border.

Shah praised the SSB for curbing smuggling of narcotics, arms, counterfeit currency, and wildlife products, and for preventing human trafficking and infiltration by anti-national elements.

Shah lauded SSB for promoting self-employment among the youth at borders by providing them with training while ensuring national security. *—PTI*

Union Home Minister Amit Shah during the 61st Raising Day of SSB, near Siliguri, on Friday *PHOTO: PTI*

1 JAN, 1935 - 20 DEC, 2024

Chautala: Ex-CM with a controversial legacy

CHANDIGARH, 20 DEC

Indian National Lok Dal president and five-time Haryana chief minister and the man who passed his Class 12 exams from Tihar Jail when he was 82, Om Prakash Chautala was a politician with a chequered career and life marked by some highs and many lows.

The eldest son of former deputy prime minister Devi Lal, Chautala carried forward his father's political legacy as a prominent Jat leader.

Chautala's career was marked by highs and controversies. In 1990, Haryana's Meham assembly seat witnessed large-scale violence, known as the "Meham Kand," which led to multiple deaths and accusations against him of attempting to rig the polls.

Though he spent several years in jail and virtually retired from active politics towards the end, Chautala remained the patriarch of the family that plays a prominent role in Haryana politics. While his younger brothers Pratap and Ranjit Chautala followed him into politics, one nephew is a sitting INLD MLA.

Though Chautala virtually retired from politics, he remained the patriarch of the family that plays a prominent role in Haryana politics *PHOTO: PTI*

His most significant setback came in 2013 when he, his son Ajay, and 53 others were convicted in a teacher recruitment scam involving 3,206 illegal appointments of junior basic teachers. Sentenced to 10 years in prison, Chautala made headlines for passing his Class 10 and Class 12 exams while incarcerated, inspiring the film Dasvi, starring Abhishek Bachchan.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi expressed condolences, acknowledging Chautala's long-standing role in Haryana politics and his dedication to advancing the work of Devi Lal. The party said in a statement that Chautala raised his voice against anti-people policies many times and went to jail many times and also spent 19 months in jail during Emergency. *—PTI*

US sanctions India's Atlantic Navigation for Iran trade

WASHINGTON DC, 20 DEC

India-based Atlantic Navigation OPC Private Limited was slapped with American sanctions on Thursday on charges of trade of Iranian petroleum and petrochemicals.

The United States imposed sanctions on Thursday on four entities and three vessels involved in the trade of Iranian petroleum and petrochemicals, which generate billions of dollars' worth of revenue for the Iranian regime, the Department of Treasury said.

"Iran continues to rely on its shadowy network of vessels, companies and facilitators to finance the development of its nuclear programme, the proliferation of its weapons systems and support to its proxies," said Acting under Secretary for Terrorism and Financial Intelligence Bradley T Smith.

Department of State also imposed sanctions on four entities engaged in the Iranian petroleum trade and identified six vessels as blocked property. Iran's oil exports are enabled by a network of illicit shipping facilitators in multiple jurisdictions who, through obfuscation and deception, load and transport Iranian oil for sale to buyers in Asia, it said. Atlantic Navigation OPC Private Limited is an India-based company involved in the transport of Iranian petroleum as the ISM manager of the vessel VIGOR, the State Department said.

Additionally, the Secretary of State determined that Ghezel Hesar Prison in Iran meets the criteria under section 106 of the Countering America's Adversaries through Sanctions Act. *—PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

RG Kar case: Cal HC allows sit-in by doc's forum

KOLKATA, 20 DEC

The Calcutta High Court on Friday allowed an organisation of doctors to hold a demonstration from 20 to 26 December to press their demand for speedy justice for RG Kar Medical College and Hospital's medic who was allegedly raped and murdered in August. The court, however, directed the Joint Forum of Doctors to hold the protest programme at a place, 50 feet away from Dorina crossing at Esplanade in central Kolkata as that would cause traffic snarls in the busy area. Justice Tirthankar Ghosh said that since the organisers are doctors, they would take into account if there is any hardship created to the common people commuting in the area while holding the demonstration. *—PTI*

UP woman kills stepchild, black magic suspected

KOCHI, 20 DEC

A woman from Uttar Pradesh was taken arrested on Friday for allegedly killing her six-year-old stepdaughter in Nellikuzhi, Kothamangalam. According to the police, Muskan, the daughter of Ajaz Khan, a native of Uttar Pradesh, was found dead in her bed on Thursday morning. Ajaz, a carpenter in Nellikuzhi, was allegedly influenced by Noushad, a Kothamangalam native, in an incident involving family disputes and possible links to black magic and sorcery, according to preliminary investigations. Following the incident, the police took Ajaz Khan and his second wife, Aneesha, into custody. The arrest of Aneesha was recorded on Friday after she confessed to the crime during interrogation. According to police, Aneesha smothered the child after Ajaz left their home at around 8.30pm on Wednesday. *—PTI*

MP woman kills spouse's employee suspecting affair

MADHYA PRADESH, 20 DEC

A woman allegedly stabbed her husband's employee to death, suspecting her of having an affair with him, and injured another woman in Madhya Pradesh's Jabalpur city, police said on Friday.The police on Thursday arrested Shikha Mishra, 35, for the killing that took place at Professor Colony on Wednesday, an official said. Additional Superintendent of Police Anand Kaladgi said the victim, Anika Mishra, 33, worked at the construction company run by the accused woman's husband, Brajesh Mishra. Anika, a woman suspected of having an affair with her husband, was stabbed and injured by Shikha after a heated argument. Anika died from her injuries, while Sonam is undergoing treatment at a hospital. Shikha fled the scene and was arrested at Satna railway station on Thursday. *—PTI*

Beeping e-device creates panic near Kochi Infopark

KOCHI, 20 DEC

An electronic device left outside a restaurant near Kakkanad Infopark here created panic in the area after it started making a 'beeping' sound. It led to the bomb squad being called and it in turn found that the device was not an explosive, police said on Friday. A device, possibly left in a bag, may have been left there to create panic or be a trial run before planting a real explosive. The incident occurred around 11pm on Thursday when a patron found a helmet in the bag atop his bike. Police are investigating the cause and the device's location to determine its purpose. They believe it is possible to find out who kept it there and what it was used for. *—PTI*

2nd abandoned Shiv temple found in Aligarh

Bajrang Dal says idols were strewn all over the place and premises were in a mess

ALIGARH, 20 DEC

Leaders of Hindu Right-wing organisations have announced that another abandoned Shiv temple was discovered at Sarai Miyan, a thickly-populated Muslim locality under Delhi Gate police station in Aligarh.

The discovery came on Thursday evening, barely 36 hours after a similar abandoned temple was found and revived at Sarai Rehman locality, another Muslim-dominated locality under Bannadevi police station area.

Harshad, secretary of the city unit of the Bhartiya Janata Yuva Morcha (BJYM), who arrived on the spot along with Ankur Shivaji, a leader of the Bajrang Dal, and many others said the locked temple premises were in a state of complete mess with idols strewn all over debris.

The locks on the gate were broken in the presence of the police and the temple was cleaned up, and purified amidst religious slogans, he added.

Superintendent of Police (City) Mrigank Shekhar Pathak told reporters late on Thursday night that meetings of peace committees are being held in these localities to ensure that these temples are fully restored and worship is carried out in a peaceful manner. According to local residents of Sarai Miyan, during the communally disturbed period before and after the demolition of the Babri mosque, the city witnessed communal riots leading to migration of Hindus and Muslims. This demographic shift led to both ghettoisation as well as creation of new colonies.

During this period a number of places of worship, especially roadside temples, were abandoned particularly in communally-sensitive areas. Mohammad Aqil Quershi, a local resident said there no worship was taking place at the temple for the past several years and no one used to visit the premises either. He said local Muslim residents, however, built a boundary wall to ensure that there was no encroachment.

There are conflicting versions regarding the age of the temple. However, most residents were of the opinion that "no worship was conducted for three or four decades" after Hindu residents of Mahour caste, who are mainly petty artisans and labourers specialising in furnaces connected to lock making operations, migrated following communal riots in that area. *—PTI*

The discovery came barely 36 hours after a similar abandoned temple was found and revived at Sarai Rehman locality, in Aligarh **PHOTO: X**

Probe begins into Illegal occupation of UP temple land

BAREILLY, 20 DEC

A probe has been launched into a land dispute involving the Ganga Maharani temple here following claims by the temple committee that the land has been occupied illegally, officials said on Friday.

The officials said Wahid Ali, however, has requested an extension of eight months to vacate the premises.

The dispute centres around Rakesh Singh, who claims to be a descendant of the family that built the temple around 250 years ago.

Singh has claimed that the temple's land was officially registered in the temple's name in 1905 and alleged that Wahid Ali and his family illegally occupied the temple building, initially under the guise of being part of the Dauli Raghuvar Dayal Sadhan Sahakari Samiti Limited, a cooperative society. Ali, however, refuted the claims, asserting that he has lived on the premises for the last 40 years as a watchman for the cooperative society. *—PTI*

Bhagwat calls for inclusivity, slams temple-mosque clashes

PUNE, 20 DEC

PHOTO: PTI

RSS Chief Mohan Bhagwat has expressed concern over resurgence of several temple-mosque disputes and said certain individuals, after the construction of Ayodhya Ram temple, seem to believe they can become "leaders of Hindus" by raking up such issues.

Delivering a lecture on 'India – The Vishwaguru', at Sahjeevan Vyakhyanmala (lecture series) here on Thursday, Bhagwat advocated for an inclusive society and said the world needs to be shown that the country can live together in harmony.

Highlighting the plurality of Indian society, the chief of Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) said Christmas is celebrated in Ramakrishna Mission, adding "only we can do this because we are Hindus".

The Ram temple was constructed since it was a matter of faith for all Hindus, Bhagwat said.

"Every day a new matter (dispute) is being raked up. How can this be allowed? This cannot continue. India needs to show that we can live together," he said without mentioning any particular site.

Several demands for surveys of mosques to unearth temples have found their way to courts in the recent past, though Bhagwat did not mention any by name in his lecture.

"Who is a minority and who is a majority? Everyone is equal here. The tradition of this nation is all can follow their own forms of worship. The only requirement is to live in harmony and abide by rules and laws," the RSS chief asserted. *—PTI*

THE SEASON OF JOY

People shop for Christmas decorations ahead of the festival, at INA market in New Delhi, on Friday **PHOTO: PTI**

11 killed after tanker collides on Jaipur-Ajmer highway

JAIPUR, 20 DEC

A devastating collision involving an LPG tanker and multiple vehicles on the Jaipur-Ajmer highway resulted in at least 11 fatalities and left over 30 vehicles engulfed in flames. The incident occurred on Friday morning, prompting an emergency response from local authorities.

According to Rajasthan Health Minister Gajendra Singh Khimsar, around 35 individuals sustained injuries, with nearly half reported as being in a critical condition. Witnesses described a scene of chaos as the tanker's outlet nozzle was damaged during the crash, leading to a severe gas leak that ignited a massive fireball.

Jaipur Police Commissioner Biju George Joseph, present at the crash site, stated, "Vehicles behind the tanker were engulfed in flames, and those approaching from the opposite direction also caught fire, leading to further collisions." Eyewitnesses reported seeing flames from a kilometre away, with thick black smoke obscuring the sky. Some were seen exiting their vehicles, desperately stripping away burning clothing. Prime Minister announced an ex-gratia payment of Rs 2 lakh from the to the families of the deceased and Rs 50,000 for the injured. The accident, which occurred around 5.45am prompted calls from leaders for improved safety measures to prevent occurrences in the future. *—PTI*

Firefighters douse the fire at the site of the accident after a truck loaded with a chemical collided with vehicles in Jaipur, on Friday **PHOTO: PTI**

Mumbai ferry crash: Search op on for 7-year-old boy

MUMBAI, 20 DEC

The search operation launched by naval boats to locate a seven-year-old boy missing after a Navy craft rammed into a ferry off the Mumbai coast two days ago continued on Friday, an official said.

Of the 113people on board both the vessels, 14 died and 98, including two injured, were rescued.

The tragedy struck when the speeding Navy craft undergoing engine trials lost control and collided with passenger ferry 'Neel Kamal' off near Mumbai coast. The ferry with more than 100 passengers was on its way from the Gateway of India to the Elephanta Island, a popular tourist attraction which has a collection of ancient caves.

Meanwhile, Navy chief Admiral Dinesh Kumar Tripathi held a meeting with top officials over the crash. *—PTI*

SC orders Punjab to shift Dallewal to hospital

NEW DELHI, 20 DEC

The Supreme Court has directed the Punjab government to relocate fasting farmer leader Jagjit Singh Dallewal, aged 70, to a makeshift hospital at the Khanauri border. This decision came amid concerns for his health, which requires continuous monitoring due to his indefinite fast since 26 November, aimed at persuading the Centre to address farmers' demands, including a legal guarantee of minimum support price (MSP) for crops.

A bench comprising Justices Surya Kant and Ujjal Bhuyan requested the Advocate General of Punjab, Gurminder Singh, to submit a formal undertaking today regarding Dallewal's transfer. Singh informed the court that the farmer leader had cooperated with medical assessments the previous day, undergoing several tests, including ECG and blood tests, and indicated that Dallewal's health condition appeared stable.

During the proceedings, the bench referenced civil rights activist Irom Sharmila, who endured a prolonged protest under medical supervision, urging the Punjab government to encourage Dallewal to undergo health examinations.

Dallewal, alongside under the banners of Samyukta Kisan Morcha (non-political) and Kisan Mazdoor Morcha, has been protesting at the Khanauri and Shambhu border points between Punjab and Haryana since 13 February, for their demands for a legal guarantee on MSP for their produce. *—PTI*

Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee President Harjinder Singh Dhami with farmer leader Jagjit Singh Dallewal **PHOTO: PTI**

SC to hear EVM verification policy plea in January

NEW DELHI, 20 DEC

The Supreme Court has scheduled a hearing for a plea concerning the verification of electronic voting machines (EVMs) for January 2025, led by Justice Dipankar Datta.

The application, presented by former Haryana minister Karan Singh Dalal and Lakhan Kumar Singla, follows the Court's previous ruling in April, which dismissed demands for a return to paper ballots, deeming such suspicions about EVM manipulation as "unfounded." The petitioners have requested a protocol for examining critical components of EVMs. *—PTI*

Several Delhi schools receive bomb threat mail

NEW DELHI, 20 DEC

PHOTO: PTI

Several Delhi schools received bomb-threat emails on Friday, making it the sixth such incident in the last 11 days, officials said.

Security personnel conducted search operations at the schools, but nothing suspicious was found, an official said.

"We received a call regarding the bomb threat at 5:02 am from DPS, Dwarka, in Sector 23," the Delhi Fire Services (DFS) official said on Friday.

Police, the fire department, bomb detection teams, and the dog squad participated in the search operation, but nothing was found so far, another official said.

Around five schools in Dwarka, along with some in other districts, received similar emails, the official said.

At some places, students were asked not to come to school, while others switched to online classes after receiving the threat, he added. *—PTI*

GREEN FIELD CITY

World Bank approves $800M for Amaravati development

AMARAVATI, 20 DEC

The World Bank's Board of Executive Directors has officially approved an USD800 million loan for the Amaravati Integrated Urban Development Program, aimed at constructing Andhra Pradesh's greenfield capital city, Amaravati. The decision was made during the board meeting in Washington, USA, on Thursday.

According to a press release from the World Bank, the program is designed to establish the city as a well-managed, climate-resilient growth hub in Andhra Pradesh, which will generate employment opportunities and enhance the lives of current and future residents, particularly those in vulnerable positions.

India requested the loan to develop Amaravati into an economic centre and the state capital of Andhra Pradesh. The loan comes with a maturity period of 29 years, which includes a six-year grace period. Notably, the government has opted to finance this loan in Japanese Yen. Auguste Tano Kouame, the World Bank's Country Director for India, said that the institution will leverage its global expertise to help design urban infrastructure and governance that fosters economic opportunities for all, particularly women, youth, and vulnerable groups. "With urban population expected to double to 950 million by 2050, there is a need to create sustainable and liveable cities as growth hubs, and Amaravati represents opportunity to pioneer this urban transformation," he said. *—PTI*

PHOTO: ANI

Andhra family gets dead body in parcel with ₹1.3cr demand

YENDAGANDI, 20 DEC

- Incidentally, Tulasi's husband went missing more than 10 years ago and never returned home, prompting her to live with her parents

The dead body of a 45-year-old unidentified man was delivered to a family here in West Godavari district in a box with a demand for over Rs 1crore-claiming it to be the compounded amount of a loan taken years ago, police said on Friday.

The box was delivered at the under-construction house of the family on Thursday night.

District superintendent of police Adnan Nayeem Asmi said the box was delivered to the family of four with a letter demanding them to pay up Rs 1.35 crore.

According to police sources, the box was delivered to Sagi Tulasi's under construction home at Yendagandi village in Undi mandal in an autorickshaw.

Incidentally, Tulasi's husband went missing more than 10 years ago and never returned home, prompting her to live with her parents

According to the police, the unidentified philanthropist told Tulasi that as they both belonged to the same caste and that she was a 'widow', he was helping her. Upon discovering the corpse, Tulasi's family informed the police. Along with the body, they also found a letter which claimed that Tulasi's husband had taken a loan of Rs 3 lakh back in 2008, which has now compounded to Rs 1.35 crore. *—PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

Tabla maestro Zakir Hussain laid to rest in US

NEW YORK, 20 DEC

Tabla maestro, Zakir Hussain was laid to rest on Thursday at a San Francisco cemetery as renowned percussionist A Sivamani and other artistes performed on their drums at a little distance away in a tribute to him.

He passed away at the age of 73 due to complications from idiopathic pulmonary fibrosis.

At his funeral, hundreds of admirers gathered to pay their respects. *—PTI*

SQUIRREL HUNTERS

For the first time, scientists observed California ground squirrels exhibiting carnivorous behaviour, hunting and eating voles. Traditionally considered granivores, squirrels were found to engage in opportunistic omnivory. A study by the University of California Davis revealed that over 42 per cent of observed interactions involved active hunting of voles

PHOTO: SONJA WILD/UC DAVIS

Foreign students told to return before 20 January

TRUMP'S SWEARING-IN

School officials have advised international students heading home for winter break to return before Inauguration Day and to prepare for possible delays at immigration control ***PHOTO: PTI***

A growing number of US colleges and universities are advising international students to return to campus before President-elect Donald Trump is inaugurated, over concerns that he might impose travel bans like he did during his first administration.

Students from India and China have accounted for more than half of all international students in the US, and about 43,800 come from the 15 countries affected by Trump's travel restrictions.

More than a dozen schools have issued advisories, even though Trump's plans remain uncertain.

At some schools, the spring semester begins before Trump will take office, so students may have to be back in class anyway.

But for anyone whose ability to stay in the United States depends on an academic visa, they say it's best to reduce their risks and get back to campus before 20 January.

Here's a look at what Trump has said and done and how schools and students are preparing for his second term:

What did Trump do in the past?

Trump issued an executive order in January 2017 banning travel to the US by citizens of seven predominantly Muslim countries — Iraq, Syria, Iran, Sudan, Libya, Somalia and Yemen.

Travellers from those nations were either barred from getting on their flights or detained at US airports after they landed.

They included students and faculty as well as business people, tourists and visitors to friends and family.

Trump later removed some countries and added others to the list — 15 nations were affected at some point during his presidency.

More than 40,000 people were ultimately refused visas because of the ban, according to the US State Department. President Joe Biden rescinded the orders when he took office in 2021.

How are students being affected?

More than 1.1 million international students were enrolled in US colleges and universities during the 2023-24 school year, according to Open Doors, a data project partially funded by the US State Department.

Jacky Li, a third-year environmental studies major at University of California, Berkeley, will be travelling home to China Dec. 21 and returning Jan. 16. Though he made his plans months before Berkeley officials sent the advisory, he said worry is growing among international students.

"There's a fear that this kind of restriction will enlarge into a wider community, considering the geopolitical tensions nowadays around the world, so the fear is definitely there," said Li, who urged Trump to support, rather than thwart, important academic research.

"If the US is really a champion of academic freedom, what you should do is not restrict this kind of communications between different countries of the world," he said.

What might Trump do now?

Trump's transition team did not respond to questions on the topic this week, but in the past he has said he'll revive the travel ban and expand it, pledging new "ideological screening" for non-US citizens to bar "dangerous lunatics, haters, bigots and maniacs."

What are schools telling students?

School officials have advised international students heading home for winter break to return before Inauguration Day and to prepare for possible delays at immigration control.

The list includes Ivy League universities such as Harvard and Brown, Boston schools such as Northeastern University and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, and other schools around the country, from Johns Hopkins University to the University of Southern California. Some offer classes that begin the day after Inauguration Day.

Cornell University told its students that a travel ban involving the 13 nations Trump previously targeted "is likely to go into effect soon after inauguration," and that new countries could be added to the list, particularly China and India.

It advised students, faculty and staff from those countries to return to campus before the semester starts 21 Jan..

Other schools didn't go so far as to say a ban is likely but instead advised students to plan ahead and prepare for delays.

—PTI

LETTERS write to us at salarenglishdigital@gmail.com

SALAR سالار

Gisèle Pelicot: A survivor breaking stereotypes

The mass rape trial that shook France is entering its final phase after ten weeks. But its implications for how we think about sexual violence and who experiences it will last much longer.

Gisèle Pelicot, 72, testified to her ex-husband's repeated, long-term sexual abuse. Dominique Pelicot admitted in November 2020 to drugging his then wife over nearly a decade, and recruiting dozens of other men to rape her. There are 50 other men on trial beyond Pelicot's ex-husband.

Gisèle Pelicot decided to waive her right to anonymity, which victims of sexual offences are entitled to in France. In doing so, she has opened the door on a tough conversation about rape in relationships and marriages. As this case exemplifies, the realities of sexual violence can be very different from what people consider to be "typical".

The stereotypical rape (and other sexual offences broadly) involves a lone, young, attractive, female victim being attacked by a male stranger, at night, in a public place. The attacker may use a weapon, and the victim resists the attack physically.

Very few cases meet all of these criteria, and most cases are drastically different. For example, many survivors of rape may be male, older or disabled. Their attackers may be people they know and trust or may be charming and generous, and the attack may take place behind closed doors. For female victims, the most commonly reported perpetrator is an intimate partner (46%), and for male victims, it is an acquaintance (38 per cent).

Pelicot is an older survivor, victimised in her own home by her former husband and others she knew. This is far departed from the "stranger danger" stereotype and speaks to a harsh reality that most cases of sexual violence occur between people who know each other, and within private spaces – often the perpetrator's or victim's home.

If a victim does not feel they meet the typical criteria for rape or sexual assault, they may minimise their own experience or not realise what has happened. This experience is especially prevalent in cases of marital or relational abuse and among male victims, where survivors may not realise their consent was important or needed for sex to occur.

As a result, non-stereotypical survivors are less likely to seek support following their victimisation and are sometimes more likely to experience negative outcomes in their physical, mental and sexual health.

Believing victims

Victims or cases that are different to the stereotype can often be discounted, experience shame, guilt and victim blaming from others, including the justice system.

Research has shown that non-stereotypical cases of sexual violence are more likely to be disbelieved or discounted, and that their cases are more likely to result in a not guilty verdict.

Male, disabled, and older survivors of rape or sexual assault are less likely to report or disclose their experiences to the police or social circles because of a fear of not being believed or treated well.

Many victims, stereotypical or not, have negative experiences when seeking help or disclosing. These cases are less likely to be taken on by the police and victims face more barriers to accessing support through sources such as domestic abuse charities.

Having positive experiences when disclosing their experience, either socially or with the police, has been found to greatly improve victim outcomes and post-traumatic growth. It also makes them more likely to seek support and report future incidents.

It is important to treat all survivors with the same degree of belief and respect, even if they do not fit your idea of what rape or sexual assault victims "should" be.

Anyone can be a victim of sexual assault. Gisèle Pelicot's case, while extreme in its nature, is a landmark. She has become a feminist hero in France, and rightly so. Her willingness to speak openly about her experiences is already helping dispel stereotypes about who experiences domestic or sexual abuse, and how they are expected to act.

This conversation must continue, to increase the likelihood that more victims will access the support they need and, if they report or disclose, that the experience will be positive and supportive one.

—The Conversation

Gisèle Pelicot, 72, victim of Mazan mass rape case ***PHOTO: ANI***

Badminton in 2024: Year of Olympic heartbreak, breakthroughs & promises

Lakshya Sen during Paris Olympics; Dynamic duo Satwiksairaj Rankireddy & Chirag Shetty; Olympic medalist PV Sindu ***PHOTOS : PTI***

The dynamic duo of Satwiksairaj Rankireddy and Chirag Shetty left a lasting impression, but Lakshya Sen's meltdown in the Paris Olympics' bronze medal match was frustration at its peak in a bitter-sweet season for Indian badminton during which moments of brilliance were often overshadowed by heartbreaks.

It was both the best and worst of times for Satwik and Chirag, who reached four finals and won two titles, raising hopes for a historic Olympic medal. However, their campaign ended in disappointment with a quarterfinal exit in Paris.

The Asian Games champions solidified their status as one of the world's top pairs with titles at the French Open Super 750 and Thailand Super 500 and runners-up finishes at the Malaysia Super 1000 and India Super 750 but the Olympics remained an elusive dream for the second time in eight years.

The heartbreaking loss saw their Danish coach Mathias Boe resign but the return of Malaysia's Tan Kim Her, who is credited with bringing Satwik and Chirag together, by the end of the year, provided a much-needed boost.

For Sen, it was a case of so near and yet so far. He was the beacon of hope for India at Paris. His journey to the semifinals at the French Open and All England Champions early in the year revived his sagging form and reignited dreams of a maiden Olympic medal.

However, the 23-year-old from Almora fell agonisingly short in the bronze medal match at the Olympics, a loss that will weigh heavily on him for a good amount of time. After a challenging return to the circuit, Sen's title win at the Syed Modi International offered optimism for the upcoming season.

Disappointment was also in store for PV Sindhu, India's two-time Olympic medallist, who endured another challenging year in 2024.

Sindhu showed flashes of her brilliance, reaching the Malaysia Masters final but her dream of an Olympic treble was dashed following a pre-quarterfinal exit, marking her first medal-less campaign in eight years.

The 29-year-old from Hyderabad, however, closed her season on a high by clinching the Syed Modi International title and is all set to tie the nuptial knot by the end of this month.

For HS Prannoy, the season was one of perseverance and adversity.

While his compatriots fell to superior opponents, Prannoy struggled with his health once again.

Indian shuttlers' medal-less show at the Olympics prompted a disappointed Padukone, the 1980 former All England champion, to call for greater accountability from the players.

Ashwini-Tanisha, Gayatri-Treesa show promise

The two women's doubles pairs -- Ashwini Ponnappa and Tanisha Crasto, and Gayatri Gopichand and Treesa Jolly -- delivered promising performances that kept Indian badminton's momentum intact.

Ashwini and Tanisha's qualification for the Paris Olympics was nothing short of miraculous, considering their modest ranking at the start of the year. While they exited early in Paris, their title win at the Guwahati Masters reinforced the belief in their partnership.

Gayatri and Treesa, on the other hand, overcame the disappointment of missing Olympic qualification to claim their maiden Super 300 title at the Syed Modi International. Their qualification for the World Tour Finals capped a breakthrough year.

While they may not yet be on the level of established stars like PV Sindhu and Saina Nehwal, several young shuttlers have shown promising performances, signalling a bright future for Indian badminton.

Among the rising talents, Anmol Kharb and Tanvi Sharma stood out. National champion Anmol played a crucial role in India's historic gold medal win at the Asian Team Championships and reached the final of the Guwahati Masters, highlighting her growing potential.

Other promising players such as Arundhati Reddy, Devika Sihag, Isharani Baruah, Ashmita Chaliha, Malvika Bansod, and Tanvi Patri also held out hope for the future.

Malvika, in particular, impressed with fearless performances against higher-ranked opponents, finishing as the runner-up at the Hylo Open Super 300.

Para shuttlers shine at Paris

Kumar Nitish led India's para shuttlers to an outstanding performance at the Paris Paralympics, securing five medals, including a gold, two silvers, and two bronzes, marking the country's best-ever showing.

Although five-time world champion and defending gold-medallist Pramod Bhagat's suspension by Court of Arbitration of Sport (CAS) due to a whereabouts clause failure was a setback, Nitish rose to the challenge, clinching gold in the SL3 category and retaining the title for India.

Other medalists included Suhas Yathiraj (silver, SL4), Thulasimathi Murugesan (silver, SU5), Manisha Ramadass (silver, SU5), and Nithya Sre Sivan (bronze, SH6), contributed in keeping India's flag flying high in Paris.

—PTI

Chinese charged for acting as Beijing's agent in US polls

ISLAMABAD, 17 DEC

A Chinese national was arrested on Thursday on charges of acting as an illegal agent for Beijing when serving as the campaign manager for an unnamed politician elected to a city council in Southern California two years ago. The arrest of Yaoning "Mike" Sun, 64, came at a time of rising concerns that the Chinese government has cultivated a network of operatives to influence local elections in the US to install politicians who are friendly to Beijing and can help promote Chinese interests. According to a complaint filed on Tuesday in the US District Court for the Central District of California, Sun is accused of conspiring with Chen Jun, who was sentenced to 20 months last month for acting as an illegal agent of the Chinese government. —*PTI*

Man suspected of killing 3 shot dead in Chicago

BERWYN, 20 DEC

A man suspected in the fatal shootings of three people in central Illinois was shot and killed by police after opening fire on them in suburban Chicago, authorities said Thursday. Officers in Berwyn responded to a report of a man with a gun around 11.30pm Wednesday. The man ran away and forced his way into a home where he fatally shot two dogs, police said. He then ran into a nearby yard where he refused police commands to stop. The man then shot at Berwyn officers and they returned fire, killing him. The man later was identified as John Lyons, 24, of Westchester, west of Chicago. Police said he was suspected in the fatal shootings of three people in Mahomet, 190 km, southwest of Chicago. —*PTI*

8 dead in Greece as speedboat with migrants capsizes

BEIJING, 17 DEC

A speedboat carrying migrants capsized Friday morning off the eastern Greek island of Rhodes, leaving eight dead and 18 rescued, Greek authorities said. The coast guard said the incident occurred while the speedboat was carrying out "dangerous maneuvers" to try and evade a patrol vessel, causing migrants to fall into the sea. A rescue effort is underway involving coast guard vessels and a helicopter as it was unclear whether other passengers were missing, authorities said. Rhodes, one of several large Greek islands located near the coast of Turkey, is on a busy illegal smuggling route in the eastern Mediterranean. The number of migrants travelling illegally to Greece is expected to top 60,000 this year, with Syrians making up the largest number, followed by Afghans, Egyptians, Eritreans and Palestinians. —*PTI*

PHOTO: X

Lanka Navy rescues 102 Rohingyas, including 25 children

COLOMBO, 20 DEC

Sri Lanka Navy has rescued over 100 Rohingyas, including 25 children, from Myanmar distressed in the seas off the island's north-eastern coast. They were spotted by local fishermen on Thursday in the Mullaithivu district's Vellamullivaikkal area. They have been brought to the eastern port of Trincomalee where further action will be taken, the Navy said. The Navy similarly rescued over 100 Rohingyas in the Sri Lankan waters in December 2022. They were repatriated with assistance from the UN refugee agency. —*PTI*

US rejects Trump's plan on govt shutdown

A day before shutdown, 38 Republicans voted against the bill defying Trump & Musk

WASHINGTON, 20 DEC

The House rejected President-elect Donald Trump's new plan on Thursday to fund federal operations and suspend the debt ceiling a day before a government shutdown, as Democrats refused to accommodate his sudden demands and the quick fix cobbled together by Republican leaders.

In a hastily-convened evening vote punctuated by angry outbursts over the self-made crisis, the lawmakers failed to reach the two-thirds threshold needed for passage -- but House Speaker Mike Johnson appeared determined to try again before Friday's midnight deadline.

"We are going to do the right thing here," Johnson said ahead of the vote. But he did not even get a majority, with the bill failing 174-235.

The outcome proved a massive setback for Trump and his billionaire ally, Elon Musk, who rampaged against Johnson's bipartisan compromise, which Republicans and Democrats had reached earlier to prevent a Christmastime government shutdown.

It provides a preview of the turbulence ahead when Trump returns to the White House with Republican control of the House and Senate. During his first term, Trump led Republicans into the longest government shutdown in history during the 2018 Christmas season and interrupted the holidays in 2020 by tanking a bipartisan Covid-relief bill and forcing a do-over.

Hours earlier, Trump announced "SUCCESS in Washington!" in coming up with the new package which would keep government running for three more months, add USD 100.4 billion in disaster assistance including for hurricane-hit states, and allow more borrowing through 30 January, 2027. But Republicans, who had spent 24 hours largely negotiating with themselves to come up with the new plan, ran into a wall of resistance from Democrats, who were in no hurry to appease demands from Trump -- or his billionaire ally Musk. The new proposal whittled the 1,500-page bill to 116 pages and dropped a number of add-ons -- notably, the first pay raise for lawmakers in more than a decade, which could have allowed as much as a 3.8-per cent bump. —*PTI*

US JUDGE WHO CHARGED ADANI RESIGNS

US Attorney Breon Peace US Attorney Breon Peace, who was involved in the charges against Gautam Adani, tendered in his resignation weeks before the Trump 2.0 administration is set to take over. According to the Department of Justice, First Assistant United States Attorney Carolyn Pokorny will become the Acting United States Attorney for the Eastern District of New York upon Peace's departure. Appointed by President Joe Biden in 2021, Peace will leave office just days before President-elect Donald Trump assumes office on 20 January.

PHOTO: X

Pak's missile schemes a threat to US: White House

WASHINGTON, 20 DEC

Asserting that Pakistan developing sophisticated missile technology will give it the capability to strike targets well beyond South Asia, including in the US, a top White House official said on Thursday that the Asian country's actions are an emerging threat to the United States.

Such a remark by the top White House official comes a day after the US slapped sanctions on four Pakistani entities, including the state-owned flagship aerospace and defence agency -- National Development Complex (NDC) -- on charges of them contributing to Pakistan's ballistic-missile programme.

The other three entities are Akhtar and Sons Private Limited, Affiliates International and Rockside Enterprise. All three are based in Karachi. Based in Islamabad, the NDC is responsible for the ballistic-missile programme. It has worked to acquire items to advance Pakistan's long-range ballistic missile programme. —*PTI*

US deportations under Biden rose to decade high

MCALLEN, 20 DEC

US Immigration and Customs Enforcement deported more than 2,70,000 people to 192 countries, including India, over a recent 12-month period, the highest annual tally in a decade. The deportations were nearly double from 1,42,580 in the same period a year earlier and came as part of a broader push by Joe Biden to reduce illegal immigration. The tally was the highest since 2014, which saw the removal of 3,15,943 people, and higher than any year of Donald Trump's 2017-2021 administration, according to US government statistics. —PTI

Russia claimed it executed strikes on vital military targets **PHOTO: PTI**

Russia, Ukraine rain missiles on each other

KYIV, 20 DEC

A Russian ballistic missile strike on Ukraine's capital, Kyiv, early on Friday resulted in at least one death and nine injuries, authorities reported. This attack was framed by Moscow as retaliation for a Ukrainian missile assault on Russian territory, which allegedly involved American-made weaponry.

Witnesses reported at least three loud explosions in Kyiv shortly before dawn. Falling debris from the missiles caused fires and damage across three districts, impacting infrastructure significantly. The city administration revealed that the attack disrupted heating services for 630 residential buildings, 16 medical facilities, and 30 schools and kindergartens.

Russian Ministry of Defence indicated that its strike was a direct response to a Ukrainian missile assault on the Rostov border region. This earlier attack reportedly involved six American-made Army Tactical Missile Systems (ATACMS) and four Storm Shadow missiles supplied by the United Kingdom. The Kremlin has expressed mounting anger over the use of Western-supplied arms by Ukraine to target Russian soil. In response to the Ukrainian offensive, Russia claimed it executed precise strikes on vital military targets. —*PTI*

Zelenskyy calls Putin dumb***

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky criticized Russian President Vladimir Putin as a dumb*** on Friday after Putin boasted during his year-end news conference about testing Russia's new Oreshnik nuclear-capable missile on Kyiv to assess Western air defenses. Zelensky condemned Putin's remarks, accusing him of treating civilian deaths as "interesting."

'OCCUPATION UNLAWFUL'

UNGA asks ICJ to tell Israel what it needs to provide in Gaza

UNITED NATIONS, 20 DEC

The United Nations General Assembly has approved a resolution requesting that the International Court of Justice (ICJ) clarify Israel's obligations regarding humanitarian assistance for Palestinian civilians in Gaza and the West Bank. The vote, held on Thursday, saw 137 in favour, 12 against, and 22 abstentions, with the United States voting against the resolution.

This move comes in the wake of a previous ICJ ruling in July, which deemed Israel's presence in the occupied territories as unlawful and called for an end to its occupation and settlement activities. The resolution also addresses recent Israeli legislation that effectively bans the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA) from operating in the territories.

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres has highlighted that no other UN agency can fulfill the role of UNRWA and reiterated that Israel, as the occupying power, is responsible for meeting the basic needs of Palestinians under international law. Norway's Deputy Foreign Minister Andreas Kravik stressed the moral imperative for the international community to respond to the humanitarian crisis in Gaza, where widespread hunger and famine threaten the population. In response, Israeli Ambassador to the UN, Danny Danon, dismissed the resolution as another instance of what he termed a "diplomatic circus" aimed at undermining Israel's right to self-defence. The resolution seeks specific guidance from the ICJ regarding Israel's obligations to ensure the delivery of essential humanitarian supplies to Palestinian civilians. —*PTI*

This move comes in the wake of a previous ICJ ruling in July, which deemed Israel's presence in the occupied territories as unlawful **PHOTO: X**

IMPEACHED YOON SUMMONED FOR QUESTIONING

SEOUL, 20 DEC

South Korean authorities have issued a summons for impeached President Yoon Suk Yeol to be questioned on Christmas Day regarding his controversial declaration of martial law on 3 December. This follows Yoon's repeated refusals to cooperate with the ongoing investigation led by the Corruption Investigation Office for High-Ranking Officials, supported by police and military authorities.

Yoon, impeached by the opposition-controlled National Assembly on 14 December, faces allegations of abuse of authority and orchestrating a rebellion. His powers have been suspended as he prepares to defend himself at the Constitutional Court, which will decide his fate. The investigation has already resulted in the arrests of several senior military officials, including Yoon's defence minister, for their roles in the enforcement of the martial law.

Allegations include the deployment of armed troops to surround the National Assembly in a bid to prevent a vote to rescind the martial law decree. —*PTI*

SL to get new policy on foreign vessel visits

COLOMBO, 20 DEC

Sri Lanka is set to establish a national policy regarding the docking of foreign research vessels, according to Foreign Minister Vijitha Herath. This announcement comes in light of increasing requests from Chinese surveillance ships, raising security concerns in India.

Herath's remarks follow Sri Lankan President Anura Kumara Dissanayake's recent visit to India. In January, Sri Lanka imposed a year-long moratorium on foreign marine scientific survey vessels in its waters and Exclusive Economic Zone following strong objections from India and the US regarding the presence of high-tech Chinese vessels. Herath confirmed that the moratorium remains in effect and will be reviewed accordingly.

Upon returning from India, Dissanayake met with a senior Chinese official, who expressed a desire for Chinese research vessels to resume visits to Sri Lanka. When asked whether India raised concerns about these visits during Dissanayake's trip, Herath stated that India's apprehensions stemmed from national security and regional stability threats. He assured that Sri Lanka would not permit actions on its territory that could jeopardise Indian security. Herath described the visit as a success for Sri Lanka, elevating bilateral relations, though he noted that no formal agreements were signed apart from two MoU. —*PTI*

Vijitha Herath **PHOTO: X**

'NO FIND, NO FEE'

Malaysia resumes search for MH370

KUALA LUMPUR, 20 DEC

Malaysia's government has given provisional approval for a second "no find, no fee" proposal from Texas-based marine robotics firm Ocean Infinity to renew the search for missing flight MH370, which vanished over the southern Indian Ocean in March 2014. Transport Minister Anthony Loke announced the decision on Friday, stating that Cabinet ministers agreed during a meeting last week.

The proposed new search area covers 15,000 square kilometres of ocean and has been identified by Ocean Infinity based on the latest analyses and data from experts and researchers. Loke expressed confidence in the credibility of the company's proposal.

Flight MH370 disappeared from radar shortly after take-off from Kuala Lumpur en route to Beijing, carrying 239 people **PHOTO: X**

Flight MH370 disappeared from radar shortly after take-off from Kuala Lumpur en route to Beijing, carrying 239 people, predominantly Chinese nationals. Following various search efforts, debris linked to the aircraft has been discovered along the east African coast and on Indian Ocean islands, but an extensive multinational search yielded no definitive clues regarding the plane's wreckage.

Under the terms of the "no find, no fee" agreement, the Malaysian government will incur no costs unless Ocean Infinity successfully locates the wreckage.

Loke mentioned that negotiations to finalise the agreement's terms and conditions are expected to conclude by early 2025.

He reiterated the government's commitment to continuing the search and providing closure to the families of the MH370 passengers.

Ocean Infinity's CEO, Oliver Punkett, has indicated that the company has enhanced its technology since its 2018 search and is collaborating with experts to refine the search area. —*PTI*

Accused in UnitedHealthcare CEO murder to face death row

NEW YORK, 20 DEC

Luigi Mangione, the man accused of murdering UnitedHealthcare's CEO, was transported back to New York to face new federal charges, including stalking and murder, which could result in the death penalty upon conviction. The 26-year-old was remanded in custody without bail after a brief appearance in Manhattan federal court.

Arrested in Pennsylvania on 9 December, following the fatal shooting of 50-year-old Brian Thompson on 4 December, Mangione was supposed to be arraigned on state charges related to the murder. During the court appearance, he remained silent, occasionally confirming his understanding of the charges. —*PTI*

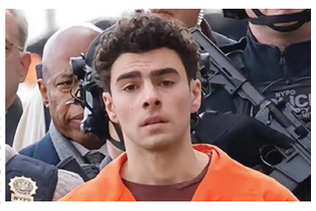

PHOTO: X

DIDDY AND LUIGI TO BE JAIL MATES

UnitedHealthcare CEO Brian Thompson's murder accused Luigi Mangione is reportedly remanded to Brooklyn's Metropolitan Detention Centre, the same facility currently housing Sean "Diddy" Combs. The two accused share not only a jail but also legal representation. Diddy's high-profile attorney Marc Agnifilo's wife Karen Friedman Agnifilo has taken on Mangione's defence. —*Agencies*

PHOTO:ANI

Gold dips ₹170; silver plunges ₹1,850

MUMBAI, 20 DEC

Gold prices extended the slide for the third straight session and fell Rs 170 to Rs 78,130 per 10 grams in the national capital on Friday amid selling by jewellers and stockists, according to the All India Sarafa Association. The precious metal of 99.9 per cent purity ended at Rs 78,300 per 10 grams on Thursday. Silver prices plunged Rs 1,850 to Rs 88,150 per kg due to reduced offtake by industrial units and coin makers. The white metal closed at Rs 90,000 per kg in the previous session. The price of gold of 99.5 per cent purity went lower by Rs 170 to Rs 77,730 per 10 grams against the previous close of Rs 77,900 per 10 grams. *—PTI*

Rupee recovers from all-time low, gains 10P to 85.03

MUMBAI, 20 DEC

The rupee saw some recovery from its all-time low level and appreciated 10 paise to close at 85.03 (provisional) against the US dollar on Friday, on softening of the US dollar index and a potential intervention by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI). Forex traders said the rupee is likely to remain in a weakening mode due to significant dollar demand. The Dollar Index (DXY) is expected to remain elevated, with resistance near the 110 level in the near-term amid a reduced likelihood of significant Fed rate cuts in 2025. During the day it witnessed an intraday high of 84.95 and a low of 85.12 before ending the session at 85.03 (provisional) against dollar, higher by 10 paise over its previous close. On Thursday, the rupee depreciated 19 paise and breached the crucial 85 level to close at a fresh all-time low of 85.13 against the US dollar. *—PTI*

Paper industry's revenue may dip 2-3% in FY25: Crisil

MUMBAI, 20 DEC

Paper manufacturers' revenue is likely to decline 2-3 per cent in the current fiscal mainly due to subdued realisations, rating agency Crisil said in a report on Friday. The agency, in its report, projected a 2-3 per cent year-on-year decline in revenue this fiscal, after a price-led decrease of 6-7 per cent last fiscal, primarily due to subdued realisations. The operating margin of Writing and Printing (W&P) paper manufacturers is set to contrac by 400-500 basis points (bps) to 15-16 per cent this fiscal, following a similar correction last fiscal from the unusually high levels of fiscal 2023. The contraction is driven by costlier hardwood and softwood (key inputs to make pulp, the primary raw material) and softening realisations, said the report. *—PTI*

US firm to restore 7 SpiceJet planes

NEW DELHI, 20 DEC

SpiceJet has entered into an agreement with US-based StandardAero that will provide the services for operationalising the airline's grounded Boeing 737 MAX planes and three of the aircraft are expected to return to service by April 2025. Seven Boeing 737 MAX aircraft of the no-frills carrier are on the ground. The airline has inked an agreement with MRO (Maintenance, Repair and Overhaul) services provider StandardAero for enabling restoration of its grounded Boeing 737-8 MAX fleet, according to a release on Friday. The agreement with StandardAero follows successful arrangements with CFM International – the manufacturer of LEAP-1B engines – lessor for Boeing 737 MAX aircraft. *—PTI*

GST Council to review rate rejig for 148 items

In its 55th meet today, it will decide on reducing tax rates on life and health insurance premiums

JAISALMER, 20 DEC

The GST Council, in its meeting on Saturday, is likely to decide on reducing tax rates on life and health insurance premiums, while hiking it on high-end wrist watches, shoes and apparels, besides considering a separate 35 per cent tax slab for sin goods.

The 55th meeting of the GST Council, chaired by Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman and comprising state counterparts, is likely to discuss rate rejig in about 148 items, besides, it will also deliberate on bringing Aviation Turbine Fuel (ATF), a major component for airline industry's operation cost, in the Goods and Services Tax (GST) fold.

The GST rate is also proposed to be cut on food delivery platforms like Swiggy and Zomato, to 5 per cent (without input tax credit), from the current 18 per cent (with ITC).

However, the Fitment Committee (comprising tax officers from the Centre and states) is likely to have proposed a rate hike to 18 per cent on sale of used EVs as well as small petrol and diesel vehicles to 18 per cent from the current 12 per cent. This hike would bring used and old smaller cars and EVs at par with old larger vehicles, according to sources.

The 55th meeting of the GST Council, chaired by Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman and comprising state counterparts, is likely to discuss rate rejig in about 148 items. It will also deliberate on bringing Aviation Turbine Fuel, major component for airline industry's operation cost, in Goods and Services Tax fold **PHOTO: PTI**

- The GST rate is also proposed to be cut on food delivery platforms like Swiggy and Zomato, to 5 per cent (without input tax credit), from the current 18 per cent (with ITC)

Also, the Group of Ministers (GoM) on GST compensation cess is likely to get a six month extension till June, 2025, to submit their report.

In the GST regime, compensation cess at varied rates is levied on luxury, sin and demerit goods over and above the 28 per cent tax.

One of the major items on the agenda of the Council is to decide the GST rate on health and life insurance. Another major item before the Council is the GST rate rationalisation panel's report, which has suggested rate tweaks in 148 items.

The Group of Ministers on rate rationalisation under Bihar Deputy Chief Minister, also decided to propose rationalising tax rates on apparel. As per the decision, ready-made garments costing up to Rs 1,500 would attract 5 per cent GST, those between Rs 1,500 to Rs 10,000 would attract 18 per cent.

The GoM also proposed hiking GST on shoes above Rs 15,000/pair from 18 per cent to 28 per cent.

The GoM had proposed reducing GST on packaged drinking water of 20 litre and above to 5 per cent from 18 per cent, and reducing tax rate on bicycles costing less than Rs 10,000 to 5 per cent, from 12 per cent.

Meanwhile, Real money gaming firms-backed Skill Online Games Institute (SOGI) has demanded that the government levy 28 per cent GST on platform fees instead of on deposit for gaming companies in India. *—PTI*

DUE TO RISK AVERSION

Sensex tanks 1,176 points, Nifty falls below 23,500

MUMBAI, 20 DEC

Equity benchmark indices Sensex and Nifty plunged about 1.5 per cent on Friday, taking their downtrend to the fifth straight session, due to risk aversion in the global markets after the hawkish stance of the US Federal Reserve.

The 30-share BSE benchmark tumbled 1,176.46 points or 1.49 per cent to settle at 78,041.59. During the day, it slumped 1,343.46 points or 1.69 per cent to 77,874.59.

The NSE Nifty tanked 364.20 points or 1.52 per cent to 23,587.50.

From the 30 blue-chip Sensex pack, Tech Mahindra, IndusInd Bank, Axis Bank, Mahindra & Mahindra, Tata Motors, Larsen & Toubro, State Bank of India, Tata Consultancy Services, UltraTech Cement and Reliance Industries were the biggest laggards.

In contrast, JSW Steel, Nestle and Titan were the gainers.

In Asian markets, Seoul, Tokyo, Shanghai and Hong Kong settled lower.

Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) offloaded equities worth Rs 4,224.92 crore on Thursday, according to exchange data.

Falling for the fourth day running, the 30-share BSE benchmark tanked 964.15 points or 1.20 per cent to settle at 79,218.05 on Thursday. The Nifty tumbled 247.15 points or 1.02 per cent to sink below the 24,000 mark at 23,951.70. *—PTI*

Bihar gets record ₹1.8L cr investment; Adani Group promises ₹28,000 crore

PATNA, 20 DEC

Adani Group, Sun Petrochemicals and a host of other companies - big and small - on Friday committed to investing a record Rs 1.81 lakh crore in Bihar, across sectors ranging from renewable energy to cement, food processing and manufacturing.

Hitherto considered laggard, the state signed investment commitments with 423 companies at its only second investor meet, Bihar Business Connect 2024.

Sun Petrochemicals will invest Rs 36,700 crore in renewable energy projects including pump hydro and solar plants. Adani Group, which is the largest private investor in the state, committed to investing about Rs 28,000 crore in setting up a ultra super critical thermal power plant as well as expanding cement production capacity, food processing and logistics businesses.

NTPC Green, the renewable energy arm of the state-owned electricity generating giant, committed to investing Rs 10,000 crore in clean energy projects. SJVN, formerly known as Satluj Jal Vidyut Nigam, committed a similar amount for pump storage projects. Construction and engineering major Ashoka Buildcon promised an investment of Rs 9,000 crore in setting up a green hydrogen unit in the state.

NHPC, India's largest hydroelectric producer, committed an investment of Rs 5,500 crore in setting up 1,000 MW solar project while SLMG Beverages (a bottler for Coca-Cola) committed Rs 3,000 crore, Shree Cements Rs 800 crore and Haldiram Snacks Pvt Ltd Rs 300 crore.

Tata group, though not signed up any investment commitment, has pledged to skill workforce in the state. *—PTI*

Bihar Deputy CM Vijay Kumar Sinha along with state Industries Minister Nitish Mishra, Energy Minister Bijendar Prasad and Pranav Adani, Director Adani Enterprises, release a coffee table book during Bihar Investor Summit 2024, in Patna, on Friday **PHOTO: PTI**

- Adani Group committed to investing about Rs 28,000 crore in setting up a ultra super critical thermal power plant as well as expanding cement production capacity, food processing and logistics

HC clears Dharavi project award to Adani Group

MUMBAI, 20 DEC

Bombay High Court on Friday upheld tender awarded to an Adani Group firm by the Maharashtra government for the Dharavi slum redevelopment project in Mumbai, ruling there was no "arbitrariness, unreasonableness or perversity" in decision.

A division bench of Chief Justice DK Upadhyaya and Justice Amit Borkar dismissed a petition filed by UAE-based Seclink Technologies Corporation challenging the state government's decision to award the project to Adani Properties Pvt Ltd, which had made a Rs 5,069-crore offer.

PHOTO:X

Seclink Technologies had emerged as the highest bidder for the project in 2018, but the tender issued in that year was later scrapped by government.

"The grounds urged in support of the petition lack force and accordingly, the challenge to the impugned action on the part of the authorities, whereby the earlier tender process was cancelled and fresh tender process has been resorted to, fails," the HC observed.

The Adani Group had emerged as the highest bidder for the 259-hectare Dharavi Redevelopment Project in the heart of Mumbai and bagged it with its Rs 5,069-crore offer in the 2022 tender process.

In the first tender issued in 2018, Seclink Technologies had emerged as highest bidder with its Rs 7,200-crore offer.

The government had, however, cancelled the 2018 tender and issued a fresh one in 2022 with additional conditions. Seclink Technologies challenged both the cancellation of the 2018 tender and subsequently the 2022 tender award to the Adani Group. *—PTI*

India's forex reserves drop $2 billion to $652.86 billion

MUMBAI, 20 DEC

India's forex reserves dropped by USD 1.988 billion to USD 652.869 billion for the week ended 13 December, the RBI said on Friday.

In the previous reporting week, the overall reserves had dropped by USD 3.235 billion to USD 654.857 billion.

The reserves have been declining for the last few weeks, and the drop has been attributed to revaluation, along with forex market interventions by the RBI to help reduce volatilities in the rupee. The forex reserves had increased to an all-time high of USD 704.885 billion in September.

PHOTO:X

For the week ended 13 December, foreign currency assets, a major component of the reserves, decreased by USD 3.047 billion to USD 562.576 billion, the data released on Friday showed.

Expressed in US dollar terms, the foreign currency assets include the effect of appreciation or depreciation of non-US units like the euro, pound and yen held in the foreign exchange reserves.

Gold reserves increased by USD 1.121 billion to USD 68.056 billion during the week, the RBI said.

The Special Drawing Rights (SDRs) were down by USD 35 million to USD 17.997 billion, the apex bank said.

India's reserve position with the IMF was also down by USD 27 million to USD 4.24 billion in the reporting week, the apex bank data showed. *—PTI*

Goyal, Sefcovic discuss India-EU FTA

NEW DELHI, 20 DEC

Union Minister Piyush Goyal on Thursday night discussed India–EU Free Trade Agreement (FTA) negotiations, High Level Dialogue, India-EU Trade and Technology Council, other high level engagements and trade and investment issues in a video conferencing with European Commissioner Maros Sefcovic.

The ministry said in a statement issued on Thursday night, "Piyush Goyal held a video conference with Maros Sefcovic, European Commissioner for Trade and Economic Security, Inter-institutional Relations and Transparency at 2030 hrs today".

After the meeting, Sefcovic posted on X, "The overall EU-India trade and investment relationship is yet to reach its full potential. Glad to have exchanged with Minister Piyush Goyal on the best way to advance our trade negotiations. An opportunity to deepen our strategic ties."

The meeting was attended by senior officials from both the sides.

This was the first introductory meeting between the two leaders after the assumption of the charge of the new European Commission of the European Union (EU).

Goyal welcomed that President Ursula von der Leyen was elected for a second mandate by the European Parliament in July 2024.

The commerce and industry minister said Prime Minister Narendra Modi was given a historic and unprecedented third mandate by the people of India. With continuity and stability, both sides would strive to deepen the relationship amidst growing uncertainty and turbulence, he said. *—ANI*

HUNT FOR 'GOOGLEYNESS'

Google slashes 10% of managerial staff: Report

CALIFORNIA, 20 DEC

Google has laid off 10 per cent of its managerial staff as part of an ongoing efficiency initiative, targeting roles at the manager, director, and vice president levels. This move follows a competitive push in the AI sector, with rivals like OpenAI posing a threat to Google's search business.

CEO **Sundar Pichai** emphasised a shift towards generative AI, with the launch of Gemini 2.0. These layoffs mark the fourth round this year, following job cuts in January and June. The company's ongoing efficiency drive, which began in 2022, has already resulted in significant role eliminations. Pichai acknowledged the challenges of these decisions, stressing the need for adaptation in a rapidly changing market.

PHOTO:X

The layoffs in 2024 mark the fourth round, including cuts to Google's global advertisements team and cloud unit. By January 2023, over 12,000 roles, or 6.4 per cent of its workforce, were eliminated. CEO Sundar Pichai took responsibility for these decisions, acknowledging the need for adjustments after periods of rapid growth. He emphasized that these steps were essential for the company's future efficiency.

The layoffs followed a thorough company-wide audit that assessed product areas, functions, and regions across Alphabet. However, Pichai admitted that the company could have managed layoffs more effectively. *—Agencies*

'Baseless': Tata denies Starbucks exiting India

NEW DELHI, 20 DEC

Tata Consumer Products (TCP) has dismissed rumours about its joint venture partner, Starbucks, exiting India. Reports suggested Starbucks might shut operations due to high costs, bad taste, and mounting losses. TCP called these claims "baseless" in a letter to the National Stock Exchange of India, BSE Limited, and Calcutta Stock Exchange on Thursday, affirming compliance with SEBI regulations.

Starbucks workers to spread stir across US

Workers at Starbucks stores in Los Angeles, Chicago and Seattle, who are on a five-day strike from Friday could spread their agitation to hundreds of stores across country by Christmas. *—PTI/ Agencies*

Gwadar to host PSL draft, PCB announces

KARACHI, 20 DEC

PCB on Friday announced that the coastal city of Gwadar in the restive province of Balochistan will host the players draft for the Pakistan Super League (PSL) on 11 January. Pakistan was also contemplating England and Dubai as possible venues. PCB Chairman Mohsin Naqvi said other details like timing of the draft and venue would be shared later. Gwadar is the heart of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor and has one of the most beautiful and scenic grounds in the country but due to recent attacks at its security, it has not hosted any cricket matches. *—PTI*

European Leagues reject breakaway soccer proposal

MANCHESTER, 20 DEC

The organisation that represents European soccer leagues rejected latest proposals for a breakaway super league. Detailed plans for a new rival to the Champions League — the Unify League — were released this week by Madrid-based A22 Sports Management. t was not clear what support there was for the proposed competition, but A22 said it had held discussions with clubs, leagues and "other parties." The European Leagues, which represents 39 leagues and associations, said in a statement that it rejects "any suggestion that a consultation took place with our organization." Attempts to launch a Super League in 2021, in which 15 top clubs were protected from relegation, collapsed in the face of angry fan protests. *—PTI*

GPKL, IPKL to launch Global Kabaddi League

GURUGRAM, 20 DEC

The kabaddi world witnessed a groundbreaking announcement as the organisers of the Global Pravasi Kabaddi League (GPKL) revealed its merger with the Indian Premier Kabaddi League (IPKL). This strategic alliance has resulted in the Global Indian Pravasi Kabaddi League (GI-PKL), where both men and women will compete under a unified league banner on the same mat size, a first in the sport's history. The merger marks a significant leap for Kabaddi, blending GPKL's focus on women's empowerment and IPKL's expansive vision to create a globally resonant league. GI-PKL ensures representation from countries across the world, bringing together diverse talents to promote kabaddi internationally. GI-PKL will begin with 12 teams, with 6 Men and 6 women teams. A total of 66 matches would be part of the first Season. The league will spread over almost close to a month. *—ANI*

PHOTO: ANI

Afghan pacer Farooqi fined for dissent

DUBAI, 20 DEC

Afghanistan left-arm pacer Fazalhaq Farooqi has been fined 15 per cent of his match fee for showing dissent at an umpire's decision during the second ODI of the three-match series against Zimbabwe in Harare. Farooqi was penalised for breaching Level 1 of the ICC Code of Conduct. The incident occurred in the fifth over of Zimbabwe's innings on Thursday when Farooqi showed dissent after an LBW appeal against Craig Ervine was turned down. Farooqi gestured for a review despite the absence of DRS in the match. Farooqi admitted the offence and accepted the sanction proposed by match referee Andy Pycroft, and levelled by on-field umpires Chris Brown and Percival Sizara, third umpire Langton Rusere and fourth umpire Iknow Chabi. *—PTI*

Sabar's gold breaks Asian Youth weightlifting record

India bags 4 medals, 2 gold and 2 bronze in Asian Youth C'ship

DOHA, 20 DEC

India's Jyoshna Sabar created a new youth Asian record for total lift on her way to winning the gold medal in the 40 kg weight category at Asian Youth Weightlifting Championships for boys and girls here on Friday.

Jyoshna won the top prize in the 40kg youth girls category by heaving 135kg (60kg snatch + 75kg clean and jerk).

Payal too claimed a gold medal, in the youth girls 45kg section with a total lift of 155kg (70 snatch + 85 clean and jerk).

There was another Indian athlete named Payal, who won a bronze medal in the junior girls 45kg competition, finishing on the podium after managing a total lift of 155 (70 snatch + 85 clean and jerk), while Babulal Hembrom ended third in the 49kg youth boys section after lifting 197 (88 snatch + 109 clean and jerk).

Akanksha Vyavahare finished fifth in the 45kg junior girls event with a total lift of 151, while Preetismita Bhoi also settled for a fifth place finish after managing a total lift of 145 in the 45kg youth girls category. *—PTI*

Jyoshna Sabar wins gold medal in 40kg weight category at Asian Youth Weightlifting Championships **PHOTO: X**

India reaches final with 4-wicket win over Sri Lanka on Friday **PHOTO: X**

India storm into U19 Women's T20 final

SINGAPORE, 20 DEC

A rampaging India extended their unbeaten run at the U19 Women's T20 Asia Cup as they reached the final with a four-wicket win over Sri Lanka in their last Super Four contest here Friday.

Aayushi Shukla emerged the wrecker-in-chief with a four-wicket haul as the left-arm spinner conceded only 10 runs in her four overs to help India restrict Sri Lanka to 98 for nine after skipper Niki Prasad opted to bowl.

Parunika Sisodia, who also bowls left-arm spin, chipped in with two scalps.

Such was India's domination that only two Sri Lankan batters -- Sumudu Nisansala (21) and captain Manudi Nanayakkara (33) -- could manage double-digit scores.

A 22-run fifth-wicket stand between Nanayakkara and Nisansala was the best for the Lankans. They raised hopes of a rival but the latter's run out punctured all their hopes.

India did not have the best of starts with opener Ishwari Aswar running herself out in the third ball of the chase without bothering the scorer.

Left-arm spinner Chamodi Praboda (3/16) led the Sri Lankan fightback by dismissing three Indian batters but opener G Kamalini (28) and Gongadi Trisha (32) ensured that the small run-chase was completed.

India had thrashed Pakistan by nine wickets in their tournament-opener and then got the better of Bangladesh and Sri Lanka while the contest against Nepal did not yield any result. *—PTI*

NEUTRAL MODE ON

Pakistan veterans glad as Champions Trophy impasse ends

KARACHI/LAHORE, 20 DEC

Pakistan's former players have expressed their relief after the ICC reached a breakthrough in the Champions Trophy impasse with India playing all its matches of the mega event at a neutral venue instead of host country under a reciprocal arrangement.

In return, Pakistan will also play all its games in ICC events hosted by India at a neutral venue until the ongoing cycle ends in 2027.

The deadlock over the hosting of next year's Champions Trophy finally ended on Thursday.

"I think the PCB took the sensible approach and instead of doing something rash and facing isolation in the ICC and among other cricket nations, it opted for a solution where I think the PCB has gained more than the BCCI," said the legendary Javed Miandad.

He added that he was earlier hoping that India would agree to play their matches in Pakistan.

"Still Pakistan is hosting a big event after a very long time and we have sent a clear message that if you don't come and play in our country, we will also not play in India," Miandad said.

The arrangement will apply to the Champions Trophy 2025 (Pakistan), next year's women's Cricket World Cup in India and the T20 World Cup in 2026 in India and Sri Lanka.

India had refused to travel to Pakistan for the event scheduled in February–March due to security concerns. India have not played in Pakistan since the 2008 Mumbai terror attacks. *—PTI*

Pak junior hockey team needs NOC for Indian visa

LAHORE, 20 DEC

The Pakistan Hockey Federation (PHF) has been told to secure government clearance before confirming participation in the FIH Junior World Cup scheduled to be held in India in 2025.

PHF Secretary-General Rana Mujahid said the team would require a No Objection Certificate from the federal government for the national squad to travel.

"Normally, we have always been permitted by our government to play in major events in India in recent years despite the strained relations. But now, we have been informed to first get clearance before finalising the team and confirming participation," he told the media in Lahore. *—PTI*

Hazare Trophy: Shaw his own enemy, says MCA

MUMBAI, 20 DEC

The Mumbai Cricket Association (MCA) has brushed aside Prithvi Shaw's emotional outburst after his exclusion from the Vijay Hazare Trophy squad, asserting that the temperamental batter has flouted disciplinary norms regularly and is "his own enemy".

A senior official of the MCA claimed that the side was at times "forced to hide" him on the field because of his poor fitness, discipline and attitude.

Shaw had expressed his frustration at not being picked in the 16-member squad for the Vijay Hazare Trophy in a viral social media post some days ago after being a part of the side's title-winning Syed Mushtaq Ali Trophy campaign.

"In the Syed Mushtaq Ali Trophy, we were playing with 10 fielders as we were forced to hide Prithvi Shaw. The ball would pass near him and he would barely be able to get to it," the official said on conditions of anonymity.

"Even while batting, we could see he was troubled reaching to the ball. His fitness, discipline and attitude are poor and it is pretty simple, there cannot be different rules for different players," he claimed.

"Even the seniors in the team have started complaining about his attitude now," he added.

During the Syed Mushtaq Ali Trophy, Shaw missed training sessions regularly after showing up at the team hotel at "six in the morning". *—PTI*

Dhiraj, Deepika emerge national champions

JAMSHEDPUR, 20 DEC

Olympian duo of Dhiraj Bommadevara and Deepika Kumari overcame tough challenges from their respective opponents to emerge men's and women's recurve champions in the Archery Senior National here on Friday.

Representing Petroleum Sports Promotion Board (PSPB), Deepika, who has returned empty-handed from four Olympics, defeated her Paris Games teammate Ankita Bhakat 6-2 in the women's final.

Olympian duo Dhiraj Bommadevara, Deepika Kumari **PHOTO: X**

Kolkata's Ankita, who represents Jharkhand, took the second set as Deepika faltered but the seasoned archer regained her rhythm to seal the title.

Rising archer from Haryana, Divyansh Chaudhary also gave India international Dheeraj some anxious moments by holding the first two sets.

But the Services archer won the next two sets to clinch the men's title with a 6-2 margin.

Deepika earned two gold medals for PSPB, adding a second in the mixed team event where she partnered her husband Atanu Das to defeat Punjab 6-2. *—PTI*

BGT: Konstas called for Boxing Day Tests

MELBOURNE, 20 DEC

Teenage sensation Sam Konstas was handed a maiden call up as Australia on Friday dropped rookie opener Nathan McSweeney for the final two Test matches of the Border-Gavaskar Trophy against India.

The 19-year-old is set to become Australia's youngest Test batting debutant in over 70 years.

If Konstas, who turned 19 on 2 October, is selected in the playing XI in the Boxing Day Test, he would become Australia's youngest Test debutant since captain Pat Cummins, who was 18 years and 193 days old when he made his debut against South Africa in Johannesburg in 2011.

The teenager would also become the youngest specialist batter to debut for Australia since Ian Craig when he played against South Africa at the MCG in 1953 aged 17 years 239 days.

Konstas' inclusion follows a series of disappointing performances from the Australian top order in the first three Tests especially McSweeney.

The 25-year-old, who made his Test debut in the series-opener in Perth, failed to score a single half century and could only manage scores of 10, 0, 39, 10 not out, 9 and 4 in his six innings and was dismissed by Indian pace Jasprit Bumrah spearhead four times. *—PTI*

Inter Milan reaches Italian Cup QFs

MILAN, 20 DEC

A much-changed Inter Milan side eased to a 2-0 victory over Udinese in the Italian Cup.

Marko Arnautovic and Kristjan Asllani netted in the first half to help Inter set up a quarterfinal match against Lazio — the team it routed 6-0 in the league on Monday. Inter coach Simone Inzaghi made eight changes to that side.

The match was briefly halted shortly before half-time when a spectator collapsed in the stands. The fan was immediately treated as the stadium fell into silence and the players looked on, clearly concerned.

A defibrillator had to be used before the fan was carried out on a stretcher to the applause of the San Siro crowd. The fan was reportedly stable in the hospital.

When play resumed after a delay of more than five minutes, the Udinese players still seemed distracted as Asllani's corner from the left evaded everyone and went in off the far post.

That put Inter 2-0 up as it had broken the deadlock in the 30th minute following an Udinese error. *—PTI*

Marko Arnautovic and Kristjan Asllani netted in the first half to help Inter set up a quarterfinal match against Lazio **PHOTO: X**

AVANI HOLDS TOP 20, HITAASHEE FIGHTS FOR LET QUALIFIERS

MARRAKECH, 20 DEC

Avani Prashanth stayed in the top-20 to keep alive her hopes of the Category 12 Ladies European Tour card as she shot 2-under 71 in the Final Qualifiers, here.

Avani, whose four rounds have been 69-69-73-71 is 8-under and Tied-13th as the top-20 get the Category 12 status for 2025.

The next best Indians are Amandeep Drall (70-71-72-72) and Sneha Singh (73-70-72-70) who are both at 5-under.

Among other Indians in the Final Qualifiers, Hitaashee Bakshi, who began the Qualifiers slowly with 76-77 continued her fight back as she shot 67-68 in the next two rounds to make the subsequent cuts and will have a further chance to improve from T-51st place. *—PTI*

ON 12 JANUARY

BCCI SGM to elect Jay Shah's replacement

NEW DELHI, 20 DEC

BCCI will hold a Special General Meeting (SGM) in Mumbai on 12 January to elect its new secretary and treasurer after the two posts were vacated by Jay Shah and Ashish Shelar respectively earlier this month.

The BCCI constitution states that any post lying vacant should be filled within 45 days by calling a Special General Meeting. The upcoming BCCI SGM will be held within 43 days of the deadline.

Shah has already taken over as the youngest chairman of ICC on 1 December and Shelar, a seasoned BJP politician, has been sworn in as a cabinet minister in the recently-formed Maharashtra government.

As per the Lodha Committee reforms accepted by the Supreme Court, one person can't hold two positions. Shah, who still had a year left in his BCCI tenure before the mandatory cooling off period, relinquished his post as required.

Shelar, who has been a Maharashtra BJP president, had to quit the BCCI post as Lodha Reforms do not allow any minister or public servant to be an office-bearer.

The 71-year-old Jyoti, who is a retired 1975 batch Gujarat cadre IAS officer, served as India's chief election commissioner from July 2017 to January 2018.

Currently, Assam's Devajit Saikia is performing the duties of Board's interim secretary, while the treasurer's position is lying vacant.

It is expected that the choice of both secretary and treasurer will be a unanimous one. *— PTI*

TENDULKAR, KAPIL DEV'S CALL LEAVES ASHWIN EMOTIONAL

CHENNAI, 20 DEC

Former Indian off-spinner Ravichandran Ashwin expressed his feelings after seeing names of former India skipper Kapil Dev and legendary India batter Sachin Tendulkar on his call logs on the last day. "If someone told me 25 years ago that I would have a smartphone with me and the call log on the last day of my career, I would have had a heart attack. Thanks, @sachin_rt and @therealkapildev paaji." *—ANI*